

The Stormy Relations between Rafael Correa and Social Movements in Ecuador

by
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Despite persistent calls for examining the diversity of Latin America's "pink tide," many scholars continue to divide the governments into a simplistic "good" or moderate left and a "bad" or radical/nationalist left. Ecuador's Rafael Correa is inevitably included with Venezuela's Hugo Chávez and Bolivia's Evo Morales as part of a triad of radical left-leaning governments in South America. While Correa, along with Chávez and Morales, has faced threats to his power from the traditional conservative oligarchy, the greatest challenges to his government have come from the social-movement left. These dissidents have criticized his administration for failing to foster transformation of the structures that exploit and oppress marginalized communities. A constant difficulty for social-movement activists has been challenging Correa from the left without strengthening a common enemy on the right.

A pesar de insistentes llamados a examinar la diversidad de la llamada "marea Rosa" latinoamericana, muchos académicos continúan dividiendo burdamente a estos gobiernos en una izquierda moderada o "buena" y una izquierda nacionalista, radical y "mala." Rafael Correa de Ecuador se ve incluido, inevitablemente, en el grupo de Hugo Chávez de Venezuela y Evo Morales de Bolivia, una triada de radicales de izquierda en América del Sur. Aunque Correa, junto a Chávez y Morales, ha tenido que enfrentar a la oligarquía conservadora tradicional, los mayores desafíos a su gobierno han provenidos del movimiento social izquierdista. Estos disidentes han criticado a su administración por no fomentar la transformación de las estructuras que explotan y oprimen a las comunidades marginadas. Una constante dificultad para los miembros de los movimientos sociales ha sido desafiar a Correa desde la izquierda sin así fortalecer al enemigo común que es la derecha.

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In January 2012, Ecuador's president Rafael Correa completed five years in office with the highest approval ratings of any leader in Latin America and international accolades for his achievements. All social indicators appeared to be moving in a positive direction: poverty had dropped, employment was up, wages were up, literacy and health measurements were up, and the equality gap was closing.¹ Heavy social spending on roads, hospitals, and schools had resulted in a growth rate of 8 percent for 2011, up from 3.6 percent the previous year and above the government's prediction of 6.5 percent. This dramatic growth rate—the highest in Latin America—came despite uncontrollable external pressures due to the global crisis of capitalism, including variations in the

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price of petroleum and declines in international credit and remittances from migrant families. Correa's successes in overcoming political instability, inequality, and a weak economy led economist Jayati Ghosh (2012) to describe Ecuador as "the most radical and exciting place on Earth."

Whereas supporters applauded Correa's achievements, conservative opponents denounced his autocratic moves. While Ghosh described Correa's policies as putting the country's reputation as a banana republic behind it, the *Washington Post* (2012) contended that the handling of a defamation lawsuit against *El Universo's* editor Emilio Palacio was "worthy of a banana republic" and criticized the president for leading "the most comprehensive and ruthless assault on free media under way in the Western Hemisphere." The *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* followed with similar editorials decrying Correa's attempt to stifle a free press and his threats to democratic governance in the region. The *San Francisco Chronicle* (2012) described Ecuador as "a nation ruled with a heavy hand by a lightweight dictator who seems to wish he were Hugo Chavez of Venezuela."

Lost between these competing narratives on the Correa presidency were the demands of Ecuador's leftist social movements for a more egalitarian and participatory society. At the same time that the international media alternately championed Ecuador's economic advances and decried the government's attacks on freedom of expression, Humberto Cholango, president of the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador—CONAIE), one of the country's best-organized and most militant social movements, denounced the criminalization of social protest that had led to activists defending themselves against charges of terrorism and sabotage. Furthermore, Cholango condemned the extractive policies that permitted transnational mining and petroleum companies to commence operations without gaining prior consent from communities that faced the direct negative consequences of those enterprises. The government had failed to find the political will to move forward with concerns central to Indian movements, Cholango contended, including pursuing an agrarian revolution, a redistribution of water, and the creation of a plurinational state. In contrast to Correa's rhetoric of leaving the long, cold, dark night of neoliberalism behind, Cholango charged that the government had fundamentally continued the economic and social policies of previous governments (CONAIE, 2012).

While government supporters dismissed social-movement criticisms as an insignificant or minority perspective or, worse, as part of a conservative attack on an overwhelmingly popular leftist president, those of us committed to social justice in Latin America should be wary of such a hasty dismissal of their concerns. Far from representing a reactionary or even an anarchistic political position, Ecuador's social movements, with organizations such as CONAIE in the lead, have emerged from a long history of radical leftist organizing efforts (Becker, 2008). Nevertheless, a constant danger of criticizing a government that identifies itself as part of the left is that doing so may embolden the right. The political scientist Emir Sader (2011: 104), for example, cautions social movements against launching frontal attacks on friendly governments and "mistaking a vacillating ally for the enemy." He contends that, despite their moderate and contradictory policies, these new governments are not the same as previous ones. He urges social movements to recognize their positive advances and

ally themselves “with the progressive sectors of these governments, with the aim of strengthening these sectors and concentrating the attack on the hegemony of finance capital” (66). He denounces a doctrinaire and ultra-left position that advances criticisms, denunciations, and abstract demands for socialism “with no grasp of concrete reality” (133). While recognizing the importance of grassroots resistance, he also points to the need to engage structures of power. Although these political struggles are difficult and fraught with compromises and contradictions, Sader contends, if social movements retreat into autonomous spaces they will isolate and marginalize themselves. A challenge for social-movement activists is to learn how to pressure the government to be more responsive without undermining their own class interests and political agendas.

Approaching current “pink-tide” governments from the perspective of a social-movement agenda challenges the assumptions that many scholars bring to the subject. Gary Prevost, Carlos Oliva Campos, and Harry Vanden (2012: 14) note a relative absence of academic studies on the interactions between leftist governments and social movements and raise probing questions about this relationship. Do social movements keep pressure on the new governments or give them a reprieve from their protests? Do they act independently, or do they become cheerleaders for governmental policies? Do progressive governments see them as partners to be consulted on policies, a political force to be co-opted, or opponents to be held at arm’s length? Do the governments bring movement activists into key leadership positions, or do they respond to challenges with the same repressive apparatus as previous governments? Finally, can either a social movement or a leftist political party achieve shared goals of social justice without the support, pressure, and structure of the other?

Politically engaged social movements were key to laying the groundwork for new left governments and remain critical to the advancement and survival of a leftist agenda. The Ecuadorian example illustrates that leftist political parties cannot gain traction against the entrenched economic and political interests of the traditional oligarchy without the enthusiasm and energy of mass social movements, but neither can social movements achieve their ambitious transformative agenda without gaining control over governmental structures. Moves to the left require pragmatic steps that are inherently contradictory and inevitably lead to conflict. Activists question the wisdom of subjugating the power of their movements to a charismatic president who did not emerge from their ranks and who has a mixed track record on challenging the structures that keep marginalized people in an exploited and oppressed situation.

MANY LEFTS

Despite persistent calls for examining the diversity of Latin America’s pink tide, many scholars continue to divide the governments into a simplistic “good” or moderate left and a “bad” or radical/nationalist left. In this scheme, Ecuador’s Rafael Correa is inevitably included with Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and Bolivia’s Evo Morales as part of a triad of radical left-leaning governments in South America. Scholars and activists of the right (Castañeda and Morales, 2008), left (Harnecker, 2011), and center (Weyland, Madrid, and Hunter, 2010)

all follow this pattern, often with little understanding or appreciation of the uniqueness of the Ecuadorian case. Such simplistic contrasts fail to convey the complexities of underlying divisions and the contrasting relationships that the different governments have developed with social-movement organizations. As Jon Beasley-Murray, Maxwell Cameron, and Eric Hershberg (2010: 9) caution, “dichotomizing the left into radical populists and social democrats conveniently reproduces the old cleavage between revolution and reform within the new context of democracy and globalization.” Sader (2011: xi) notes that “all new revolutionary processes appear in heterodox fashion and seem to contradict rather than confirm the predictions of socialist theorists” and that formulas for a revolution cannot be repeated. As Steve Ellner (2012: 112) acknowledges, “diversity and complexity characterize the political landscape” of these three countries, and of the three Ecuador in particular requires deeper and more careful study.

Correa first won election to Ecuador’s presidency in November 2006 by positioning himself as part of Latin America’s leftward drift, which pledged to create more participatory governing structures (de la Torre, 2010). In office, Correa followed strategies similar to those of his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chávez to consolidate his power. Beginning with the presidential race, Correa won six elections in the course of less than five years. In April 2007, 80 percent of the Ecuadorian electorate approved a referendum to convoke an assembly to rewrite the constitution. In September 2007, Correa’s new political party Alianza País (Country Alliance—AP) won a majority of seats in the Constituent Assembly. A year later, almost two-thirds of the voters approved the new constitution that delegates had drafted largely under Correa’s control. As was the case with Venezuela’s 1999 constitution, Ecuador’s new Magna Carta so fundamentally remapped Ecuador’s political structures that it required new local, congressional, and presidential elections. Correa also dominated these contests, including winning the April 2009 presidential election with 52 percent of the vote. In May 2011, voters narrowly approved a referendum that concentrated additional power in the president’s hands.

Despite Castañeda and Morales’s criticism of a “populist left” as disrespecting democratic institutions, neither Chávez, Morales, nor Correa could reasonably be called antidemocratic, particularly if we define democracy narrowly as free and fair elections. All three have relied heavily on electoral processes to consolidate their power and continue to rule through civilian institutions. Adherence to democratic institutions in itself does not distinguish them from twentieth-century socialists, because at different historical junctures leftist leaders in Latin America have relied on elections as one of several avenues to power. Generally what characterizes this new wave of leftist governments is a move from representative to participatory government, with Brazil’s Workers’ Party providing leadership in this regard.

Weyland, Madrid, and Hunter (2010: 141) criticize radical populist governments for using constituent assemblies to rewrite political rules and concentrate power in the executive. This argument not only is ahistorical but ignores the current political environment in Ecuador. In contrast to countries such as Chile and the United States, Bolivia and Ecuador have frequently rewritten their constitutions to serve the dominant political interests of the moment. A

common sentiment in Ecuador when Correa took office was that while the current constitution, written only 10 years earlier, had made some gains, the dominant sectors of society that controlled its drafting had made too many compromises to make it a useful document. Among other issues, many people agreed that Ecuador needed a stronger executive to address the problem of frequent and extraconstitutional changes in power. Rewriting the constitution had long been a key social-movement demand, and the strong support for the finished text demonstrated the depth of popular approval of this transformative project.

Weyland (2010: 25) contends that the confrontational approach of what he terms a “contestatory” left did not create a sustainable foundation for permanent change. But if opponents feared the destabilizing effects of radical populist governments, Ecuador’s experience does not bear this out. Correa’s election produced unprecedented political stability after a series of highly disruptive neoliberal governments, and with his reelection in 2013 he appears positioned to remain in office for a full decade. This stability is due in part to popular support for his policies and his political agenda and in part to the country’s exhaustion after frequent extraconstitutional changes in government. Having in effect crushed the traditional political parties and the conservative opposition, the social-movement left provided the greatest challenge to Correa’s government. These activists have been dissatisfied with the pace of change, but their long-term interests would not be served by removing him from power.

SOCIAL POLICIES

In office, Correa has implemented policies that shifted resources to poor and marginalized sectors of society. Many of his moves against the conservative oligarchy have earned him broad popular acclaim. For example, in July 2008 he expropriated 195 companies belonging to the Isaías Group in order to recover some of the assets that customers had lost when corporate corruption led to the collapse of its bank, Filanbanco, in 1998. He gained further support when in December 2008 he defaulted on more than US\$3 billion in foreign bonds. Although the treasury had the ability to make payments, not doing so was a political statement in defense of the country’s sovereignty. Correa rhetorically labeled the debt that previous governments had contracted as “illegal, illegitimate, and corrupt” and designed only to benefit the upper classes. He argued that Ecuador should sacrifice debt payments rather than cut social investments (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 2008). Previously most of Ecuador’s oil revenues had flowed out of the country, a trend that Correa sought to reverse. A July 2010 law increased the government’s share of petroleum profits from 13 to 87 percent, in the process increasing state revenues by almost US\$1 billion. More importantly, the government also increased its ability to collect taxes, especially from corporations. As a result, it significantly added to the revenue available for infrastructure investment and social spending without burdening the country with debt as many conservative opponents had feared.

Castañeda and Morales (2008) criticize radical populist governments for emphasizing social programs over economic productivity. The new Latin

American left has willingly accepted compromises in economic performance in exchange for gains in empowerment, participatory democracy, and popular organization. The pattern of economic growth in Ecuador indicates that Correa has largely avoided such trade-offs. Instead, he has embraced the humaneness of socialism while pursuing the efficiency of capitalism. In the lead-up to the February 2013 presidential elections, he raised taxes on bank profits in order to increase bonds designed to benefit the poorest sectors of society. In addition to tripling spending on education and health care, he increased subsidies for single mothers and small farmers. Supporters applauded the subordination of private property to the public good, and the president's social policies played very well with Ecuador's impoverished majority.

Few social-movement activists would share Castañeda and Morales's (2008) or Weyland's (2010) argument that moderate governments are better positioned than radical ones to address the failures of neoliberalism, reduce inequality, or deepen democracy than radical ones. Despite fears to the contrary, increases in tax collection, including those on windfall petroleum profits, seem not to have deterred foreign investment, with the government continuing to sign new contracts with transnational corporations for mining and oil development. As in Venezuela, indicators point to dramatic economic growth under the Correa administration. To be sure, there was much to be applauded in Correa's administration, which significantly increased social spending in an attempt to reduce poverty and economic inequality.

Correa implemented many other popular demands, including removing U.S. forces from an air base in Manta, refusing to sign a free-trade agreement with the United States, and convoking a constituent assembly. Many activists cheered when on June 27, 2012, Correa announced his decision to pull Ecuador out of the U.S. Army's School of the Americas, which had trained thousands of Latin American military officials, many of whom led or participated in coups against civilian elected governments. A subsequent August 16, 2012, decision to grant Wikileaks founder Julian Assange political asylum further won the president acclaim from those to his left.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss or ignore the social movements' criticisms of Correa's political positioning. In contrast to Castañeda and Morales, activists have complained that the president was too willing to sacrifice empowerment and broader levels of popular participation to achieve higher levels of economic performance, particularly in the extractive sectors. They have argued that his social policies are neither as revolutionary nor as socialist as many observers had hoped. Notwithstanding his radical rhetoric, Correa did not emerge from either Ecuador's political left or the powerful social movements that had repeatedly challenged the traditional conservative oligarchy's hold on power. Environmentalists opposed his state-centered development projects, which led to significant tensions over mining, petroleum, and other extractive industry policies. His agrarian policies favored large-scale economic development, thereby alienating rural communities that formed the base of Ecuador's powerful Indian rights movements. Militants have accused Correa of engaging in clientelistic programs of strategic handouts designed primarily to solidify his electoral support rather than addressing structural issues of oppression and exploitation (ICCI, 2007: 6).

Weyland (2010: 3) eschews the “radical” label for South America’s new left governments because they are more moderate than many twentieth-century social democracies and have failed to engage in comprehensive, systematic analysis of socioeconomic and political structures. None of the current new left governments approach the degree of structural transformation attempted by the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s, Salvador Allende’s government in Chile in the early 1970s, or the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the 1980s. The political and economic environment that Latin America faces in the twenty-first century differs significantly from that of previous decades. After years of neoliberal rule, state power has shrunk significantly while the strength of corporate economic interests has expanded dramatically. Despite strong rhetoric and nationalist positioning, none of the new wave of pink-tide governments has made a serious effort to restrict exports or foreign trade and investment. While steps toward privatization have stopped, few moves have been made toward the nationalization of foreign or domestic firms. Furthermore, Correa has followed Chávez’s and Morales’s lead in moving toward increased dependence on an export-oriented development strategy.

The goals of increased economic efficiency and social transformation are fraught with tension, and transformative policies require time and compromise. But many of Ecuador’s radicalized social movements question whether Correa is seriously attempting to move the country to the left. Rather than realizing the hopes and dreams for which many on the social-movement left have spent their entire lives fighting, his policies appear to be taking Ecuador in a moderate or even fundamentally conservative direction that primarily benefits wealthy capitalist interests rather than marginalized communities. Correa’s supporters criticize opponents as “ultra-leftists” for pushing or expecting the government to take more radical positions, but social-movement activists are often unwilling to accept the accommodations that political leaders need to make to stay in power. Recent political experiences with seemingly sympathetic governments have made many of these activists hesitant to accept the limited promises of what could very well be a transitory administration as the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams for a better future.

Many social-movement leaders have bitter memories of another president whom many had seen as promising sweeping changes. On January 21, 2000, Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez led an Indian-military coup that removed Jamil Mahuad from power after he implemented unpopular neoliberal policies. Although the coup failed, Gutiérrez leveraged it to win election as president two years later. At the time, supporters cheered his victory as the realization of long-held social-movement aspirations (Whitten, 2003). They quickly became disillusioned, however, when he proceeded to implement the same neoliberal economic policies as his predecessors, ruling against the interests of those who had placed him in power. His actions highlighted the fickleness of populist leaders who echo leftist discourse to win elections but once in office govern in favor of powerful economic and political interests to maintain themselves in power. Social movements and Indian rights organizations in particular emerged from the Gutiérrez debacle weakened and wary of alliances with charismatic leaders from outside.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Although at different points all of Latin America's leftist governments have had complicated relationships with social movements, Correa's has been the most difficult. While in international venues such as the World Social Forum Correa has been more eager than his counterparts to embrace the social-movement process and the broader left, he has also been the most removed from that political trajectory. Hugo Chávez, for example, had a long history of organizing for revolutionary change within the Venezuelan military. Evo Morales was a longtime leader of the coca growers' union in Bolivia (a position he kept even after winning the presidency). Uruguayan President José Mujica was a former guerrilla. Paraguay's President Fernando Lugo was a Catholic bishop influenced by liberation theology who had long worked with poor and marginalized communities. Daniel Ortega had led the Sandinistas to power in the 1970s. In contrast, as the *Economist* (2010: 44) aptly observed, with a doctorate in economics from the University of Illinois and fluent in French and English, Correa was "an unlikely revolutionary."

Without question, Correa's electoral victory was the culmination of a long history of social and popular struggles, led in the neoliberal 1990s primarily by Indian rights movements. If it had not been for these social pressures, Correa could not have gained the presidency. As did Morales (as well as Néstor Kirchner in Argentina), he rode antisystemic protests to power. Nevertheless, rather than participating in the powerful uprisings that had removed three presidents from power over the previous decade, Correa had been an obscure economics professor at an elite private school as protests rocked the country. He first acquired a public profile as minister of economics in Alfredo Palacio's government after the fall of Lucio Gutiérrez in 2005 and leveraged his actions in that position into a successful run for the presidency the following year.

Not only has Correa had a tenuous connection to the powerful and well-organized social movements that have repeatedly rocked Ecuador's political landscape but he has sought to displace or replace those movements. A combination of his policy objectives and his abrasive governing style has led to an estrangement from what initially was strong support from social-movement allies. Weyland (2010: 3) calls leftist governments "contestatory" rather than "radical" because in order to maintain the loyalty of their followers the leaders engage in confrontational politics with their adversaries. Correa, however, has been as likely to confront his seeming allies on the social-movement left as to challenge his conservative opponents, business sectors, or the U.S. government. The Unión Nacional de Educadores (National Union of Educators—UNE) moved into the opposition when Correa proposed a new evaluation system that undermined its hegemony among teachers, and the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras (National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Organizations—FENOCIN) has distanced itself from the government because of its agrarian and water policies. In response, Correa has turned to smaller and more marginal organizations such as the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (Ecuadorian Federation of Indians—FEI) or created new paper organizations to construct an illusion of social-movement support for his administration. Whereas previous governments (in particular Gutiérrez's) included several aboriginal leaders in ministerial posts and other

high-level government positions, Correa has no such representation in his administration. In fact, Mónica Chuji, who originally served as Correa's press secretary and initially provided an "Indian" face for his government, moved firmly into the opposition because of government attacks on native activists. Instead, many of the top members of his governing coalition come from the academic and nongovernmental organization worlds that felt increasingly squeezed by previous governments' neoliberal policies (*El Comercio*, 2008).

While Chávez and in particular Morales have faced pressure from social-movement dissidents, more than either of them Correa has grown distant from this potential base of support. Venezuela does not have a reputation as home to strong social movements, but Chávez has used governmental structures to encourage the development of grassroots organizations. Bolivia has a history of militant social organizing, and Morales has built on that tradition to solidify his government. Correa, in contrast, in addition to undercutting existing organizational efforts, has not used his executive power to create new spaces for grassroots social movements. He has not built structures such as the Bolivarian Circles or community councils that have characterized different stages in the development of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. He has not empowered grassroots organizations and directed funds to the local level. As a result, his citizens' revolution has not been a popular insurrection.

Indigenous peoples, environmentalists, and their allies have repeatedly challenged the president from the left even while cheering both Chávez and Morales as their allies. From their perspective, Correa has benefited from his occupation of spaces that social movements had previously created and held but failed to use these to rule on their behalf. They contend that he has been included in the "club" of left-wing presidents on the basis of superficial similarities rather than a deeper understanding of the intent of his policies or their consequences for those who seemingly would have the most to gain from them. The historian Pablo Ospina categorizes Correa's government as of the left because it has sought to destroy the power of the traditional oligarchy, but it is not a government of social movements even though it has incorporated much of their agenda into its discourse and policies. If Correa disappeared, Ospina argued, within two weeks his political movement would disintegrate. Significantly, and in contrast, if something similar happened to a leader such as Luis Macas, the social movements' organizing project would continue to advance (Guerrero et al., 2008: 12–13). For those to Correa's left, his government appears to be the attempt of yet another populist to subvert leftist discourse for the sole benefit of a charismatic leader.

Rather than rooting his government in existing social-movement organizing efforts or opening up space for new ones, Correa has built his electoral base on the unorganized and marginalized urban lower classes. Furthermore, rather than constructing a working-class movement, he has drawn in small business owners and the urban middle-class *forajido* (outlaw) movement that played a central role in the April 2005 street mobilizations that removed Gutiérrez from power. Despite his high approval ratings, without strong organized social-movement backing his support remains the proverbial "mile wide and inch deep." From the beginning it was apparent that his would not be a government of the traditional left or of the strong and well-organized social movements that had repeatedly played the role of kingmaker over the previous decade but one

of urban dwellers who responded well to clientelism and populist styles of governance. In repeatedly clashing with activists to his left, Correa seems not to appreciate that his electoral success is predicated on a historical process in which labor leaders, environmentalists, Indian activists, and others have long participated. Although he has run very effective campaigns (Conaghan, 2011), the lack of a solid movement backing could put his political project in danger from a serious extraconstitutional challenge such as that which Chávez faced in Venezuela in April 2002.

Further marginalizing the political presence of social movements, structural limitations have diminished the nearly hegemonic voice with which CONAIE previously addressed subaltern concerns. Rural-urban migration shifted demographic balances away from CONAIE's historic base of support in rural communities. Long-standing divisions between the movement's urban leadership and its rural base have resulted in conflicts over strategies, tactics, and policy divisions. When CONAIE's political wing Pachakutik took an ethnicist turn and expelled many of its mestizo members, it became estranged from other social movements with which it had previously been allied in their anti-neoliberal protests. Finally, first Gutiérrez and then Correa favored smaller but competing federations such as the Consejo de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas Evangélicas del Ecuador (Council of Evangelical Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of Ecuador—FEINE), FENOCIN, and FEI, and this official recognition weakened CONAIE's previous claim to speak for all native peoples. All of these factors have hindered CONAIE's ability to advance its social-movement agenda.

Tensions between Correa and the social movements surfaced in the debates that swirled around a May 7, 2011, referendum on 10 constitutional, judicial, political, and social issues. Instead of supporting the president, many to his left joined a campaign that urged voters to say no this time to a popular leader. These activists opposed the referendum despite the fact that it had aspects that should have been deeply appealing to the left. Two of the questions criminalized an unjustified acquisition of wealth and required employers to register their employees with the Social Security Institute, precisely the types of policies that benefited poor and marginalized people. Had the referendum and, more broadly, Correa's governing agenda primarily emphasized these policies, it would easily have earned the enthusiastic support of the majority of the population. The key questions in the May 2011 vote, however, concerned the reform of a judicial system that Correa saw as corrupt and inefficient. In fact, the referendum began as a single issue of modifying the penal code to extend the period of pretrial detention for criminals in order to address issues of public security. Opponents on both the left and the right feared that Correa was using rising crime rates as an excuse to increase his executive power.

For the social movements, government attempts to improve public security raised concerns about the criminalization of dissent, a fear that was already a reality for the 189 activists who defended themselves from charges of sabotage and terrorism for their opposition to extractive policies. In the most prominent case, four leaders—CONAIE president Marlon Santi and vice president Pepe Acacho, Ecuarrunari president Delfín Tenesaca, and president Marco Guatemal of a local federation—faced such accusations for leading protest marches at a June 2010 Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian

Alliance for the Peoples of Our America—ALBA) summit in Otavalo, Ecuador. “This government has declared war on Indian peoples,” Tenesaca declared, denouncing the criminal charges as a mechanism of social control (Hoy, 2011).

The question in the May 2011 referendum that gained the broadest attention was one that sought to curtail the oligarchy’s control over the media. While conservatives lambasted an alleged crackdown on freedom of the press, in reality the media remained firmly in the hands of the traditional oligarchy who continued to own the means of production. As in Venezuela and Bolivia, the owners of the mainstream media were solidly opposed to the current government and used the press as a weapon against progressive governmental policies. Latin America’s new left governments have learned that implementing their policy objectives requires creative use of the media to communicate their messages to the public. Chávez, of course, took the lead in Venezuela with *Alo Presidente* (Hello, President), and Correa followed with his *Enlace Ciudadano* (Citizen Link). Correa was particularly aggressive in his use of the media, dramatically expanding the number of government-owned media outlets in an attempt to broadcast his message. This expansion came with a significant increase in investment in official publicity, from US\$2 million under the previous government to US\$129 million in 2012. In the process, he crowded out the independent and community radio stations that had played a critical role in the April 2005 street protests that removed Gutiérrez from power. Meanwhile, a law that would have increased space for community media remained deadlocked in congress.

Critics of radical populist governments complain about their creeping authoritarianism, but, as Ellner (2012) notes, these charges are largely overblown. In Ecuador the most notorious case is the suit that Correa brought against *El Universo* for defamation and libel in editorializing against his actions as president. Although the case split the left with regard to whether press freedom should be of primary concern, some social-movement activists contended that a focus on liberal and individual rights failed to address more significant underlying structural faults in society.

Although Correa has followed governing strategies similar to those of Chávez and Morales and has often been very willing to ally himself with other leftist governments, from the perspective of social-movement activists his concrete policy objectives have too often come up short. Their problem with Correa is not that he is too radical but that he is too conciliatory toward imperial forces, has refused to make a clean break from Ecuador’s neoliberal past, and has failed to open up participatory spaces. In short, many activists are concerned that Correa is not left enough. The political right will not give up power easily, and in their opinion Correa’s government is not strong enough to implement the more radical proposals that they so deeply desire.

EXTRACTIVE ENTERPRISES

The geographer Anthony Bebbington (2009: 19) identifies five distinct positions in debates on the trade-offs between protecting the environment and favoring economic development: conservationist environmentalism, deep ecology, environmental justice, environmentalism of the poor, and resource-nationalist environmentalism. Clear divisions exist between the conservation-minded

environmentalism of the first two positions and the social-justice concerns of the latter three, but Bebbington points to the inherent tensions among the latter three positions, all of which are broadly associated with the left. Correa, together with Morales in Bolivia and Chávez in Venezuela, generally adheres to the resource-nationalist position, which favors national over foreign or private control of natural resources. Advocates of this position tend to be willing to sacrifice local concerns if doing so will benefit the country as a whole. In contrast, environmental activists generally adhere to the positions of environmental justice or environmentalism of the poor, which critique economic inequalities and human rights abuses from a class perspective. These activists argue that it is unjustifiable to disregard the rights of marginalized populations and charge Correa with doing so.

Ecuador's progressive 2008 constitution codified much of what popular movements and others on the political left had long demanded, including reasserting governmental control over petroleum, mining, transport, telecommunications, and other economic sectors that previous governments had privatized. Correa maintained that extractive economic activities would stimulate the economy, generate employment, and provide financing for social programs and that all of this could be accomplished without negative environmental ramifications. He favored socially responsible large-scale mining operations governed by strong state control to protect the environment and workers' rights and contended that poorly regulated artisanal mining was more damaging to the environment. He emphasized the necessity of access to the revenues that resource extraction would generate to fund important social programs. In pursuing these policies, Correa once again could be seen as following the strategies that Chávez pioneered in Venezuela and Morales adopted in Bolivia. In what conservative commentators have derisively termed "petro populism," all these governments have sought to use petroleum rents to fund social programs and encourage endogenous development.

Correa's arguments failed to persuade many opponents of the likelihood of the materialization of the promised benefits of mining, and his expansion of extractive enterprises led to growing tensions with rural communities, environmental organizations, and others to his left. A failure of progressive governments to break from a reliance on mining or agroindustrial extractive economies has similarly led to social-movement challenges of Morales in Bolivia, Lugo in Paraguay, Mauricio Funes in El Salvador, and Ollanta Humala in Peru. In each case, environmentalists and aboriginal opponents have criticized governments for not fundamentally breaking from Western economic development models predicated on the exploitation of raw materials and unlimited economic growth.

Rural communities agitated for prior and informed consent before mining activities could proceed on their lands, while Correa wanted the central government to maintain the right to decide when and where mining operations could take place (*Ayni Solidaridad*, 2008: 8). The 2008 constitution conceded that communities had the right to consultation but did not make extractive endeavors subject to their consent. This decision was a major blow to the power of social movements. Ivonne Ramos, president of the environmental group Acción Ecológica, argued that the constitution's failure to protect the rights of

local communities meant that the country had not broken from a reliance on the exploitation of natural resources as its primary source of income (Dosh and Kligerman, 2009: 24). Beasley-Murray, Cameron, and Hershberg (2010: 13) note that the idea “that indigenous peoples should have the right to participate in democratic self-government and to share in the economic opportunity to exploit natural resources is only radical from the perspective of a status quo in which basic liberal rights and freedoms are denied within the context of market economies incapable of satisfying basic human needs.” Given the dirty legacy of petroleum extraction in the Amazon, environmentalists observed that those who bore the brunt of the ecological impacts of extractive enterprises rarely realized their economic benefits.

The economist Alberto Acosta (2009: 27–28), former minister of mines, president of the 2008 Constituent Assembly, and originally one of Correa’s closest allies, broke with the president in part over a contention that extractive enterprises were not consistent with the new constitution’s emphasis on the *sumak kawsay* (living well), a Quechua concept that privileges human needs over those of capital. “We are obligated to optimize the extraction of petroleum without causing environmental and social damage,” Acosta argue. Ecuador needed to realize the highest possible social benefit from each barrel of oil extracted rather than being concerned about maximizing production. “We have to learn,” he continued, “exporting natural resources has not led to development.” Rather, “the principal factor in production and development is the human being.” Ecuador had to change, Acosta (2008: 45–46) insisted, “the view that condemns our countries to be producers and exporters of raw materials,” which historically had underdeveloped economies on the periphery of global capitalism. The value added to the processing of raw commodities accrued to advanced industrial economies, not to Ecuador. It was often said that the country became a dollar poorer for every barrel of oil that it exported. From Acosta’s perspective, *sumak kawsay* should lead to a fundamentally different concept of development. In defending government policies against opponents such as Acosta, who referred to petroleum as a “resource curse,” Correa maintained that anything could be used for good or evil and that he was determined to use Ecuador’s natural resources to create a positive development model (Pérez, 2012). Creating alternatives to an extractive economy was a long-term proposition, he said, and short-term dependence on mining for revenue and employment was unavoidable. “The economies of Latin America have always been driven by extractive exports,” Roger Burbach, Michael Fox, and Federico Fuentes (2013: 156) argue in Correa’s defense. “To expect this to change in a decade or so is entirely unrealistic.” Diametrically opposed visions of Ecuador’s future separated a government from what should have been its strongest base of support.

Both academics and activists raised their voices in opposition to the extractive economy. The economist Pablo Dávalos, who had briefly joined Correa when the future president held the post of finance minister in the Palacio administration, argued that Correa’s government “corresponds more closely to the interests of powerful groups that are emerging with the new mining and agro-fuels sectors” than to a social-movement base (Moore, 2009). The antimining activist Carlos Zorrilla (2011) contended that exporting raw materials and

importing finished projects continued patterns of economic dependency that could be traced back to the colonial period. Furthermore, he maintained, "there is no way that large-scale mining in Ecuador can avoid grossly violating the rights of nature as guaranteed in the country's Constitution." For those reasons, Zorrilla built alliances to oppose the government's extractive industries.

From an aboriginal perspective, this conflict concerned not only material factors such as agrarian economies and environmental issues but also threats to native cosmologies. Part of the opposition to Correa rested on contentions that aspects of the new constitution such as declaring Ecuador to be a plurinational state should be operationalized rather than remaining symbolic. Activists wanted a government that would be more confrontational with entrenched capitalist interests, including pressing for participatory governance that would help end the oppression of historically marginalized sectors of society.

In response to grassroots pressure, Correa attempted to negotiate an end to oil exploration in the biologically sensitive and diverse Yasuní National Park in exchange for international debt relief and development aid. Yasuní was home to the Waorani, who had gained little from the petroleum economy. In November 2007, a simmering dispute at Yasuní came to a boil. In the town of Dayuma, local inhabitants protesting oil exploitation seized control of several oil wells, demanding financing for economic development and environmental protection in support of local communities. Correa responded with a heavy hand to the disruption, deploying the military to stop the dissidents and accusing the protesters of being unpatriotic saboteurs. The government arrested 45 people and charged them with terrorism for attempting to impede petroleum extraction (Zibechi, 2009). Correa called on his opponents to respect the law. "No more strikes, no more violence," he said. "Everything through dialogue, nothing by force" (Saavedra, 2008: 4). He indicated that he would not be swayed by social-movement pressure (Zibechi, 2009). The president contended that the protesters did not have any significant support and that their leaders lacked genuine representation. "Three or four people are enough to make a lot of noise," he claimed, "but, quite sincerely, they don't have the popular backing." Rather, he claimed that he enjoyed broad public support for the mining law and that this translated into an electoral endorsement of his government (Correa, 2009).

In the midst of these conflicts, the president complained about "infantile environmentalists" creating obstacles to economic development. He dismissed groups that opposed him as part of an "infantile left" made up of "fundamentalists" who had joined forces with political conservatives in an attempt to undermine his government. Social-movement members rejected such characterizations. Acosta, for example, made it quite clear that, despite his disagreements with Correa, he would never enter into a strategic or tactical alliance with the right. He remained too principled a leftist to engage in such opportunistic political arrangements (Artieda, 2011). "We are not allied with the right," Cholango also retorted. Instead, activists challenged Correa from the left and pressed him to make a clean break with Ecuador's neoliberal past. Cholango pledged to keep fighting until the neoliberal model was destroyed. "We will not allow this process of change to be truncated, stopped, or remain half completed," Cholango declared (CONAIE, 2009).

For environmental activists committed to sustainable development, Correa's repressive responses to his opposition seemed little different from those of previous right-wing neoliberal governments. The political scientist Mateo Martínez (2011) compares Correa's attacks on environmentalists to those of his Peruvian counterpart Alan García, who framed opposition to extractive models as an attack on modernity and denounced those who opposed him as lazy and irrational people controlled by outside interests. During periods of sustained mobilization against neoliberal economic policies in the 1990s, Martínez observed, social-movement activists never faced the charges of terrorism that they now confronted under what should have been a friendly and sympathetic government. The Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas (Institute for Indigenous Sciences and Cultures—ICCI) criticized Correa for betraying "signs of subscribing to the most radical proposals of colonial territoriality in recent years," including his desire to open spaces to mining, privatize biodiversity, and increase petroleum extraction (ICCI, 2008: 8). More than any other issue, the conflicts over mining illustrated the wide, growing, and seemingly unbridgeable gap between Correa and the social movements.

Social-movement challenges to Correa's government also surfaced in protests against alleged water privatization plans. Opponents complained that a proposed water bill would allow transnational mining corporations, bottling firms, and large landholders engaged in the export of agricultural commodities such as cut flowers and bananas to appropriate water reserves in violation of the 2008 constitution. The cut-flower and mining industries required access to large amounts of water at a cost to neighboring communities. Correa responded that charges of water privatization were based on lies and misunderstandings and that his proposal had no such intent. He insisted that the proposed legislation prohibited the privatization of water and was needed to regulate water supplies. The social movements, he contended, were trying to destabilize his government and had become "useful idiots" for the extreme right. He accused intransigent radical groups of playing into the hands of conservative interests and undermining the positive gains that his citizens' revolution promised the country (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 2009b: 6). Demonstrations against the water bill grew more intense in September 2009 as the Shuar and Achuar in eastern Ecuador blocked highways with barbed wire. In an echo of protests in the Peruvian Amazon in June of that year that had resulted in dozens of fatalities, the Ecuadorian demonstration also grew deadly with the shooting of the Shuar schoolteacher Bosco Wisum. The death of Wisum seemed to shock Correa, who called for the violence to stop (Amazon Watch, 2009; Rénique, 2009).

Further alienating environmentalists, in January 2010 Correa backpedaled on the proposal to halt petroleum exploration in the Yasuní National Park in exchange for international funding for development programs. Experts estimated that the Ishpingo Tiputini Tambococha (ITT) oilfields could generate US\$7 billion a year in revenue. Several European countries had agreed to provide half of that amount for 10 years to support health care, education, and other social programs if the government left the oil in the ground. Correa complained that the proposal came at a cost to Ecuador's sovereignty. He repeatedly threatened to commence drilling operations in the park unless the program raised a sufficient amount of donations. Critics charged that Correa remained

intent on using extractive development models to build the country's economy regardless of the environmental consequences.

In an attempt to regain its previous role at the forefront of social protest movements, in March 2012 CONAIE organized a Plurinational March for Life, Water, and Dignity of the People. The purpose of the march was to defend the 2008 constitution against the government's neoliberal attacks and to pressure for the passage of water and agrarian reform laws. CONAIE denied that the march was an attempt to destabilize the government or that it was allied with the political right. Meanwhile, the government's refusal to recognize the rights of native peoples as codified in the 2008 constitution gained it the condemnation of Amnesty International (2012).

Although both Chávez and Morales have tangled with environmental and Indian rights groups that opposed their extractive-industry-based development models, they have responded to criticism in significantly different ways from Correa. Even opponents of radical populist governments applaud Chávez and Morales for opening up political participation, particularly for native peoples (Weyland, Madrid, and Hunter, 2010: 150). For example, although Morales first strongly supported the construction of a highway through the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure (Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park—TIPNIS), protests led him to reverse his position, following a policy that the Zapatistas in Chiapas call *gobernar obedeciendo* (governing by obeying the people) (Achtenberg, 2011). Correa, however, has moved in the opposite direction. When Mónica Chuji accused Correa's secretary of administration Vinicio Alvarado of illicit enrichment, the government charged her with libel, and she was sentenced to a year in prison and a US\$100,000 fine. She was subsequently pardoned, but her supporters point to the case as yet another example of the criminalization of social movements and threats to the independence of the judiciary.

DANCING WITH DYNAMITE

Despite Castañeda's inclusion of Correa as part of the "bad" left, his record in government is more mixed than this simplistic categorization implies. While Ecuador has registered many positive socioeconomic indicators and Correa has favored leftist approaches to governance, some of his concrete policy objectives have been a disappointment to Ecuador's most radical social movements. From their perspective, his inclusion in the leftward tilt in Latin America is more a result of his populist rhetoric and the hopes of his supporters than the consequence of a movement toward a more egalitarian and participatory society. The business-friendly *Latin American Weekly Report* (2009a: 3) has questioned the radicalism of Correa's reforms: "More investment in health, education and anti-poverty programmes, certainly, but these could simply be defined as social-democratic policies." His proposed reform of state structures "appears to be more about style of government than anything else," it concludes.

Analysts now talk of Latin America's "many lefts," ranging through the left-populist Peronism in Argentina with first Néstor Kirchner and then his wife Cristina Fernández, Chile's continuance of neoliberal policies under socialist presidents Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet, Uruguay's middle-class social democracy with Tabaré Vázquez and José Mujica, Fernando Lugo's liberation

theology in Paraguay, Luiz Inácio (Lula) da Silva's trade unionism in Brazil, guerrilla socialists including Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador, Bolivia's Quechua and Aymara socialism with Evo Morales, and Hugo Chávez's state-centered socialism in Venezuela and that of Raúl and Fidel Castro in Cuba (Grandin, 2009). As Michael Shifter, the vice-president of the Inter-American Dialogue, notes, Latin America "is swinging in many different directions at the same time." Shifter categorizes Correa's actions as representing "less the embrace of leftism than a desire for a new kind of politics" (Barrionuevo, 2010). The pressure from below and to the left that a mobilized and engaged social movement provides is critical to ensuring that the Correa administration will follow through on its promises.

Before the left's dramatic rise to power in the first decade of the twenty-first century, many scholars and activists saw the strength of social movements as a primary engine behind an expansion of social justice and democratic rights. When elections suddenly became a realistic and viable path to power, many observers began to overlook the important role of social movements in realizing these objectives. Meanwhile, social-movement activists and leftist politicians engaged in what journalist Benjamin Dangl (2010) calls "dancing with dynamite," an ongoing and complicated negotiation of goals and interests that has not received sufficient academic attention.

The interactions between Correa and social movements are part of a much larger dance in which strategies and ideologies in part corresponding to social cleavages in the popular base have come into conflict. The resultant complexity represents a major challenge for the left. A constant difficulty for social movements is challenging Correa from the left without strengthening a common enemy on the right. From their weakened and compromised position, social-movement activists question the point of submitting to a populist style of governance (personalistic leadership, organizational weakness, ideological vagueness) that fails to foster transformation of the structures that exploit and oppress marginalized communities. From this perspective, social movements still have a key role to play in building a more just and equitable society.

NOTE

1. The poverty rate dropped from almost 37 percent when Correa took office in 2007 to 32.8 percent in 2010 and 4 more points in 2011 to 28.6, for a total of 9 points during his first five years in power. Unemployment dropped from 6.1 to 5.1 percent in 2011, with underemployment falling from 47.1 to 44.2 percent. The Gini coefficient, which measures equality, also improved from 0.54 to 0.47 in 2011 (INEC, 2012). The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean reported that, next to Peru, Ecuador was the most successful in reducing poverty in 2010. Despite dramatic increases in per capita social spending, Ecuador still lagged significantly behind regional averages and did not come close to the amount of social investment in Cuba (ECLAC, 2011: 12).

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