

Ecuador

Ecuador is located in the northern reaches of a region that once was known as Tawantinsuyu, the ancient Inca empire. The Inca were relatively recent arrivals in Ecuador, having expanded north from their base at Cuzco in the Peruvian Andes Mountains less than 100 years before the arrival of Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro in 1532. Even in that short period of time, the Inca managed to homogenize what once had been a much more ethnolinguistically diverse population. The Spanish simply accelerated the processes of imperial conquest and colonization that had begun under the Inca.

At the time of the Inca and Spanish conquests, Ecuador was home to the Esmeralda, Huancavilca, Manta, and Puná indigenous groups on the tropical western coast; the Cañari, Cara, Palta, Panzaleo, Pasto, and Puruhá in the temperate highlands; and the "forest tribes" of the Cofán (A'í), Shuar (Jívaro), Kichwa (Quichua), and Záparo (Záparo) in the eastern upper Amazon Basin.

Colonial to Nineteenth-Century History

Despite stereotypes of the "passive Indian," native resistance to Spanish rule was vigorous throughout the colonial period and after independence into the nineteenth century. Repeated revolts delayed and reversed Spanish penetration into the Amazon, just as local inhabitants had resisted earlier Inca incursions. By the seventeenth century, native protests shifted to campaigns against colonial abuses, such as the confiscation of lands, tribute payments, compulsory tithes, labor drafts, censuses, and the exploitation of indigenous peoples.

Ecuadorian independence in 1822 did not lead to more rights for indigenous peoples, but rather to the entrenchment of exclusionary rule, with a small, white propertied class ruling over the majority indigenous and mestizo (mixed European and Indian heritage) populations. (Ecuador did not grant indigenous people citizenship rights until 1979, making it one of the last countries in the Americas to do so.) In response to this history of exclusion, in 1871, Fernando Daquilema, together with his wife Manuela León, led a massive uprising against elite abuses in the central highland province of Chimborazo. Although the revolt failed, it earned Chimborazo a reputation for being home to the most rebellious indigenous peoples in Ecuador.

In 1895, Eloy Alfaro led a successful liberal revolution that initially gave indigenous peoples hope that they finally would have someone in government who would

listen to their demands. Alfaro promulgated a series of reforms to benefit the indigenous peoples, however, he ultimately was more interested in introducing modern systems of capitalism than in remaking state structures in ways that would benefit marginalized groups. In the eastern Amazon, the government traditionally had administered indigenous communities through the Catholic missions, whereas in the highlands, they were incorporated through systems of debt peonage into privately owned states called haciendas. Critics charged that Alfaro's goal was to break up these traditional structures so that indigenous peoples could join the wage labor pools that would benefit the emergence of export-oriented agricultural plantations on the western coast.

The 1920s was a period of increasing agitation among workers, indigenous peoples, and peasants, and the decade saw some of the worst violence in the history of popular movements in Ecuador. Declining economic conditions culminated in a general strike on November 15, 1922, in the coastal port city of Guayaquil. The resulting massacre of hundreds of workers led to the birth of new labor movements. In 1926, urban leftists included indigenous leader Jesús Gualavisí in the founding of their new Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano (Ecuadorian Socialist Party). This brought increased attention to indigenous issues.

Protests were no longer solely local affairs. Communities and regions began to work together to press for common demands, drawing on cooperation and solidarity among diverse groups across broad geographic areas. At the same time, indigenous protests moved from spontaneous reactions to immediate issues to addressing broader structural concerns, reflecting a deepening political consciousness.

Modern Life

The twentieth century witnessed a dramatic expansion of indigenous organizing efforts in Ecuador. In 1944, indigenous activists, in alliance with the Communist Party, founded the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI, Ecuadorian Federation of Indians), which took a leading role in fighting for land reform. In 1964, the Catholic Church helped found the Shuar Federation in the Amazon, leading to additional ethnic-based organizations to counter the leftist FEI. Over time, these new organizations assumed more radical positions, eventually emerging as leading forces against neoliberal economic policies that weighed heavily on the poor.

In 1986, activists formed the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) in an attempt to unify all indigenous peoples under a single organization. A massive indigenous uprising in June 1990 paralyzed

Ecuador for a week but succeeded in bringing significant attention to the native peoples of the country. The emergence of CONAIE at the forefront of the protest gave Ecuador a reputation for having a well-organized indigenous movement. CONAIE presented a list of sixteen demands to the government that broadly encompassed economic, political, and social issues. The organization's demand for recognition of the presence of different indigenous nationalities in Ecuador and a revision of the first article of the country's constitution to declare it to be a plurinational state were symbolically key issues. In 1995, CONAIE helped found a political movement called Pachakutik to compete for political office.

Estimates of Ecuador's surviving native population vary widely, from a low of less than 7 percent of Ecuador's 14 million people in 2001 to a high of 40 percent, according to CONAIE. The variance is attributable to the different criteria that are used to define whether someone is indigenous, and whether it is politically

advantageous for someone to self-identify as such. The largest remaining indigenous group is the Kichwa, which are divided between those living in the highlands and those in the Amazon. Seven additional indigenous nationalities survive in the Amazon, including the Achuar, Cofán, Huaorani, Secoya, Shuar, Siona, and Zápara. In addition, a 700-person group called the Andoa is struggling to reconstruct itself as a nationality. Six identifiable indigenous nationalities and peoples survive in the coastal region: the Awá, Chachi, Epera, Manta, Tsáchila, and Wancavilca. Each of these groups is small and has struggled to preserve its ethnic identity. Elsewhere on the coast, indigenous identities either have died out or have assimilated into mainstream Ecuadorian culture. The economic influence of export-oriented agribusiness has led many indigenous people to relocate to more densely populated areas, where they have increased contact with the dominant society.

Marc Becker

CONAIE

Formed in 1986, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), known as CONAIE, is the largest indigenous organization in Ecuador, representing some thirty-one distinct groups from the coastal, Andean, and Amazonian regions. CONAIE is widely considered one of the strongest social movements in Latin America, and it is an increasingly decisive force in Ecuador's politics.

Since colonial times, indigenous communities have been among the poorest and most marginalized of Ecuadorians, even though they form a large constituency in the country; estimates range from 25 percent to 45 percent, depending on how one classifies Amerindian descendants. Founded as a coalition of existing regional federations, CONAIE's political agenda encompasses fighting for indigenous autonomy and cultural recognition, promoting solidarity and pride, securing indigenous land rights, and facilitating intercultural bilingual education.

CONAIE has served as an unprecedented model of cohesion for indigenous mobilizing efforts elsewhere on the continent. However, it also is rife with internal conflict. Tensions among ethnic groups and regional federations remain, despite the development of powerful national advocacy structures. Within the hierarchical structure of the organization, those groups that are farther from the center have expressed that they feel unevenly represented. Moreover, some social commentators contend that CONAIE's success at the national level has come at the expense of regional and local concerns.

In spite of such differences, and in the face of a hostile political environment, CONAIE has received national and international recognition for its accomplishments on behalf of indigenous rights. It has pursued an agenda of social change using a wide range of strategies, including negotiations with government representatives and formal political campaigning. Yet the organization perhaps is best known for its role in organizing popular uprisings around the country. National and regional coordinators team up with local networks of stakeholders and activists to organize marches, road blockades along major transit routes, and occupations of government buildings.

Pressure from highly publicized protests and indigenous presence has contributed to many notable political achievements since the late twentieth century. These include concessions from oil and mining industries, constitutional changes to define Ecuador as a multiethnic and multicultural state, the ousting of three presidents since 1997, and the negotiation of one of the largest land rights concessions in the continent's history.

Since the 1990s, CONAIE has shifted its focus from the defense of local autonomy toward support for inclusive democratic citizenship, and it has become directly involved in electoral politics to a greater extent. Whether this has strengthened or undermined democratic practice within the organization is contested. However, CONAIE certainly has become a key player in Ecuadorian politics, putting a face to indigenous rights on the national stage.

Emma Gaalaas Mullaney

See also: *Groups: Central and South America*—Cofán; Kichwa; Shuar. *Issues*—Colonialism; Political Participation.

Further Reading

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El Salvador

El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America, with 6 million people residing in an area of just over 8,000 square miles (20,700 square kilometers). The vast majority of the Salvadoran population consists of mestizos—people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent.

Only 1 percent of the country's inhabitants consider themselves purely indigenous, mostly Maya as well as Lenca, Pipil, and Pocomam. At the time the Spanish arrived in the early sixteenth century, a sizable indigenous population existed in El Salvador, but many of those people died during the Spanish conquest, succumbing to European diseases to which they had no immunity.

The People of El Salvador

Speaking a variety of dialects, the ancient ancestors of the Salvadoran people, the earliest Maya, transformed their environment to their advantage. They cut down trees to clear the land, dried out and drained swamp-land, and built villages on low stone platforms near water sources. Drainage ditches were being built by approximately 1100 B.C.E., indicating an increase in agriculture that coincided with the settlement of larger towns and cities.

Local chieftains originally ruled the Maya. However, in areas where agriculture was particularly rich, the chieftains amassed great wealth and consolidated their power in order to become kings, surrounding themselves with military forces to attain even greater power. They used that power to collect taxes, allowing their towns to grow ever larger. The kings commanded their subjects to build the first religious structures, generally rectangular platforms that rose to heights of up to 50 feet (15 meters), topped by temples and royal residences. In the tradition of animism, Maya kings took the name of an animal and a human-made object—for example, “Shield Jaguar.” Heirs to the throne, usually the eldest son, used that same name with an additional suffix. Occasionally, women ruled as queens. Dead kings were believed to take their place among the Maya pantheon.

More advanced centers of Maya civilization built pyramid temples rising more than 200 feet (61 meters) into the air, with stairs leading to the top. These religious structures were the locations of sacrifices to the Maya deities. A notable trait of the Maya is their development of a writing system, which used both glyphic and syllabic scripts and contained more than 800 signs. The Maya writing system was quite complex, and historians still are deciphering their alphabet.

By the time the Spanish arrived in the early sixteenth century, the power of the Maya city-states had been declining. Hernán Cortés sent Pedro de Alvarado to search for more gold, as he had found among the Aztecs. In 1523, Alvarado left with approximately 400 Spanish soldiers and was able to conquer most of the Maya empire by 1532.

The region named El Salvador by Alvarado remained under Spanish authority, together with most of the rest of Central America, until 1786. At that time, it was made into one administrative area. This had the result of creating a sense of Salvadoran nationalism that would eventually result in independence, after a twenty-seven year struggle, in 1838.

Like many Central American countries, the lives of the native peoples were focused on the *haciendas*, large agricultural landholdings by a few wealthy families. These mostly coffee-growing families controlled the government in El Salvador, and the native peoples were landless, left to work on the haciendas through the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries.

Struggles for Democracy and Native Rights in the Twentieth Century

Throughout the twentieth century, El Salvador officially had no distinct native communities, as the country did