

6 | Ecuador's *buen vivir* socialism

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Photo

On the morning of 30 September 2010, discontented police officers and military troops plunged Ecuador into a political crisis as they took President Rafael Correa hostage, seized Quito's international airport, and stormed the National Assembly building. A new public service law that raised salaries but curtailed bonuses had triggered the revolt. The protesting officers attacked Correa when he unexpectedly arrived at the police barracks to explain the law's intent. When an exploding tear gas canister injured the president, the police brought Correa to a military hospital where they held him captive. Although the police made no moves to assassinate him, they did forcefully repel a march of his supporters on the hospital. Ten hours later, an elite military squad stormed the hospital to free the president. As they fled the hospital, snipers fired on the president's armored sport-utility vehicle, killing one of the rescuers. Upon his return to the presidential palace, Correa gave a fiery speech to his gathered supporters in which he accused his political opponents of plotting his overthrow and assassination.²

The events of 30-S (as they came to be known) pointed to the contradictions, complications, and conflicts inherent in Ecuador's turn to the left. Correa came to power on the strength of his denunciation of neoliberal economic policies, but yet as president his opponents accused him that in cutting bonuses he was implementing some of the same austerity measures he had pledged to defeat. Furthermore, despite assuming strong anti-imperialist positions, Correa also seemed too willing to compromise on key socialist positions. At play were debates over what political and economic direction Ecuador should take, and whose interests those developments would benefit.

A young and charismatic economics professor, Correa first won Ecuador's presidency in November 2006. He had successfully campaigned on a platform of leaving the long, dark night of neoliberalism behind. In its place, Correa proposed to construct a government based on five revolutions: an economic revolution that re-established the government's redistributive role; a social revolution that favored equality for Ecuador's different social sectors and ethnic groups; a political

revolution to reverse the privatization of state structures and enhance participatory democracy; a revolution for Latin American integration that would create new organisms to replace mercantilist structures; and an ethical revolution to combat corruption. In 2010 two more revolutions were added, one in favor of the environment and the other for judicial reform.³ In line with other South American governments that accompanied Ecuador's turn to the left, Correa promised to fundamentally remake the country's governing structures.

Correa spoke openly of twenty-first-century socialism, and positioned himself as part of Latin America's leftward drift that pledged to open up more participatory governing structures.⁴ 'Personally, I am not a communist, I am a socialist,' said Correa in an interview with Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep, 'but a socialism for the 21st century is a socialism of *buen vivir*,' in reference to the indigenous perspective of an alternative to development based on the concept of the good life.⁵ Correa acknowledged that 'almost no one can define' twenty-first-century socialism, even while it was urgent to move in that direction. He commonly defined his perceptions in terms of what twenty-first-century socialism was not.⁶ Soon after taking office Correa said that this new form of socialism 'differs totally from the idea of state control over the means of production and traditional socialism.'⁷ Correa later summarized that twenty-first-century socialism can be defined by one word: justice.⁸ Other than ambiguous comments about curtailing the power of congress, depoliticizing the judiciary, expanding government control over natural resources, and democratizing the media, advocates generally lacked concrete proposals as to what it would do.⁹ This led Brazilian sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos to define twenty-first-century socialism succinctly as 'a metaphor for something to which one aspires but does not know exactly what it is.'¹⁰ Correa, along with other leaders, was searching for new solutions to persistent problems of poverty and inequality.

Correa notes that current ideas on socialism needed to be situated in a pluralistic tradition of many different kinds of socialism: classic, orthodox, traditional, scientific, utopian, agrarian, Christian, and even the Andean socialism of José Carlos Mariátegui. When asked what flavor of socialism he belonged to, Correa responded that his was the Ecuadorean version. Even though this new socialism shared similar values with classic socialism of social justice and placing human needs over capital, Correa said that in the twenty-first century a class struggle or government control over the means of production was no longer necessary. Instead, it was more important to democratize the means

of production, speak of Latin American integration rather than anti-imperialism, and fight for sovereignty in the face of the attempts of international finance institutions to recolonize Latin America. Finally, this new socialism should not be dogmatic, and it should think in terms of principles rather than models.¹¹

During a January 2009 trip to Cuba, Correa rejected the 'dogmas history has defeated,' including 'the class struggle, dialectical materialism, the nationalization of all property, the refusal to recognize the market.'¹² Discarding these key elements traditionally associated with socialism while failing to identify alternative visions raised questions as to what exactly Correa meant by twenty-first-century socialism. Furthermore, even as Correa distanced himself from traditional state-centered models of socialism, he still relied on government structures as a tool to advance a socialist agenda.

Citizens' revolution

In office, Correa followed a playbook that his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chávez had pioneered on how to use electoral contests to consolidate his grasp on power. Beginning with the presidential race, Correa won a succession of six elections over the course of less than five years. In April 2007, 80 percent of the Ecuadorean electorate approved a referendum to convoke an assembly to rewrite the constitution. In September 2007, Correa's new political party, *Alianza País* (AP, Country Alliance), won a majority of seats in the constituent assembly. A year later, almost two-thirds of the voters approved the new constitution that had been 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 elections. Correa also dominated these contests, including winning the 2009 presidential election with 52 percent of the vote.

The significance of Correa's re-election under the new constitution should not be understated. Most South American presidential campaigns are highly fragmented multiparty races that require either a runoff election between the top two vote-getters or a congressional decision to select the victor. For a candidate to win a high enough percentage of the vote to avert a runoff election, particularly in the crowded field of eight candidates that Correa faced in 2009, was unprecedented in Ecuador, and historically almost unheard of anywhere in South America. Having consolidated his political position, Correa appeared situated to win re-election in four years, as permitted under the new constitution, and to remain in power until 2017. Not only did

Correa's presidency appear to transcend Ecuador's stormy history of frequent and extra-constitutional changes of government, but it also seemed to be an unequivocal victory for Latin America's rising left tide.

Correa repeatedly rallied against the *partidocracia*, the traditional party system in which the oligarchy controlled the government through their dominance of all aspects of a corrupt state, including congress, the Supreme Court, and various 'autonomous' agencies. Even Michel Camdessus, the former director of the IMF, commented that 'an incestuous relation between bankers, political-financial pressure groups and corrupt government officials' characterized Ecuador's governing system.¹³ The oligarchy had consolidated their economic and political control during the 1970s oil boom. With the rise of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s, the *partidocracia* adopted a neoliberal agenda of cutting social programs and privatizing government-owned enterprises. Correa's electoral victories broke the back of the oligarchy's control over an antiquated and dysfunctional political system.

In office, Correa quickly implemented policies that shifted resources to poor and marginalized peoples. Initial economic indicators were positive, as increased government spending on healthcare and other social programs led to reductions in unemployment and poverty. A study from the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) revealed that Latin America's 'left-populist' governments of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador were making significant progress in reducing inequality, while the more moderate 'social democratic' governments of Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay had made less progress on this front.¹⁴ Despite these positive indicators, Correa repeatedly clashed with many on the traditional left and other members of Ecuador's strong and well-organized social movements. His agrarian policies favored large-scale economic development and minimized aid for small farmers, alienating rural communities that formed the basis of Ecuador's powerful Indigenous movements that had repeatedly pulled down previous neoliberal governments that ruled in favor of the oligarchy's interests. In contrast, Correa proposed a citizens' revolution that leftist critics complained was based on liberal, individualistic notions of governance rather than mass mobilizations that addressed structural issues. While his economic and social policies led to dramatic reductions in poverty and inequality, these gains were largely limited to urban areas that provided the base of his electoral support. While urban poverty rates in 2011 had fallen to 17 percent, in rural areas they continued to linger above 50 percent, and remained disproportionately higher in Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorean communities.¹⁵ When criticized for

not making more rapid and radical changes, proponents of Correa's project argued that it was impossible to solve in five years problems that were a result of five centuries of exploitation and oppression.

Correa did not emerge out of either Ecuador's political left or out of powerful social movements that had repeatedly challenged the traditional conservative oligarchy's hold on power. Instead, he had a Catholic education that gave him a strong concern for social justice but did not provide him with as sophisticated an understanding of Marxism as his counterparts, who were products of the public school system. Because he emerged out of a Catholic left, his positions on such hot-button social issues as abortion and gay marriage were also not the same as those of leftist feminists. Furthermore, environmentalists opposed his state-centered development projects, leading to significant tensions over mining, petroleum, and other extractive industry policies. Correa's agrarian policies favored large-scale economic development and minimized aid for small farmers, alienating rural communities that formed the basis of Ecuador's powerful Indigenous movements.

Rather than building on the legacy of powerful Indigenous and social movements that had removed previous presidents from power, much of Correa's electoral base came out of the urban lower classes and small business owners. Many of those who took positions in his government were from academia and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who felt squeezed by previous governments' neoliberal policies.¹⁶ Activists 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.¹⁷ From the beginning, it was apparent that his would not be a government of the traditional left, nor of social movements that had repeatedly played the role of kingmaker over the previous decades, but of urban dwellers who responded well to populist styles of governance.

Economic policies

As is common in Latin America, Ecuador had long faced the burdens of an export-oriented dependent economy. As with the rest of the Andes, Ecuador was historically divided between inward-focused domestic highland agricultural production and an outwardly oriented coastal export economy. During the twentieth century, Ecuador enjoyed three export booms that corresponded with periods of unusual political stability in which a sequence of presidents were able to complete their terms in office and peacefully pass power on to an opposing politician. The first boom came with a growth in cocoa exports at the beginning

of the century and the second with bananas at mid-century. The third and longest export boom began with the 1970s oil boom, this time based in the eastern Amazon basin rather than the coastal plain. In the 1980s, cut flower production in the highlands led a turn toward non-traditional exports. In addition, mining, particularly of gold in the southern part of the country, remained ever present.

Neoliberal economic policies in the 1990s, including raising transportation and cooking gas prices, and replacing the local currency with the US dollar, reintroduced extreme political instability into Ecuador. Correa's moves against the conservative oligarchy that implemented these policies earned him broad popular acclaim among the masses. For example, in July 2008 the president 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 their bank Filanbanco in 1998. Correa gained further support when in December 2008 he defaulted on more than \$3 billion in foreign bonds. Although the treasury did have the means to make payments, not doing so was a political statement in defense of the country's sovereignty. Correa labeled the debt that previous governments had contracted to benefit the upper classes as 'illegal, illegitimate, and corrupt.' He argued that Ecuador should sacrifice debt payments rather than cut social investments.¹⁸

Correa implemented a series of financial reforms intended to subjugate private property to the public good. The president blamed the Central Bank for sacrificing the country to foreign and neoliberal interests, and he moved to eliminate its autonomy. He taxed windfall oil profits, raised taxes on the wealthy and implemented mechanisms for more effective revenue collection. These reforms provided funding sources to increase social services, including tripling spending on education and healthcare, providing subsidies to poor people to lower their utility costs, and expanding access to credit.¹⁹ The president's social policies played very well with Ecuador's impoverished majority. These policies formed part of a nationalistic economic platform that included criticism of foreign oil corporations for extracting the majority of petroleum rents out of the country. 'Now the oil is everyone's,' Correa declared.²⁰ He stopped short, though, of nationalizing control over any natural resources, which raised questions of whether his policies were more of a social democratic flavor than those of a radical socialist.

Anti-imperialism

Popular movements in Ecuador had long criticized previous governments for sacrificing national sovereignty in pursuing policies that benefitted the interests of the oligarchy. In 1999, former president Jamil Mahuad granted the United States the rights to use a military base at Manta rent free for a Forward Operating Location (FOL) in its war against drug trafficking and guerrilla insurgents in neighboring Colombia. Opponents complained that the federal legislature had not properly approved the lease agreement, that the law was a violation of Ecuador's sovereignty, and that the agreement needlessly dragged the country into social conflicts in Colombia. Social movements had repeatedly pressed for the termination of the ten-year lease, and as a presidential candidate Correa announced that he would not renew the agreement when it expired in 2009. Correa declared that the United States could keep their base at Manta if in exchange Ecuador could maintain a base in Miami. If the United States saw no problem with foreign bases, then granting Ecuador such access would seem to comprise a fair and reciprocal agreement. A provision against foreign military bases was written directly into the 2008 constitution with the declaration that 'Ecuador is a land of peace.'²¹ Correa followed through with his campaign promises not to renew the lease, and in September 2009 the United States formally withdrew its troops. Nevertheless, even with the military forces gone from Manta, the Correa government championed its drug interdiction efforts and pledged to continue its collaboration with the United States.²²

Correa's response to Colombia's 1 March 2008 military assault on a guerrilla base in Ecuadorean territory further underscored his anti-imperialist credentials. Correa broke diplomatic relations with Álvaro Uribe's conservative government when his cross-border attack on the FARC threatened to trigger a regional crisis. Not until November 2010 and after Juan Manuel Santos replaced Uribe in office did the two countries fully restore relations. Correa's actions pointed to a principled stance against the militarization of social conflicts.

In June 2011, Ecuador was the only holdout when the Organization of American States (OAS) voted to readmit Honduras after evicting it after a 2009 military-backed coup that removed president Manuel Zelaya from office. Correa stated that Ecuador would recognize the Porfirio Lobo administration only if those involved in the coup were punished. Even the Venezuelan and Bolivian governments consented to a normalization of relations with Honduras, seemingly positioning Ecuador to their left. Only four days before the Honduran coup

Correa had joined ALBA. The coup underscored in Correa's mind the importance of international allies in the context of a polarized domestic environment.

Similarly, in April 2012, Ecuador was the only country to boycott the sixth Summit of the Americas in Colombia because of Cuba's exclusion from the meeting. Then, in June, Correa took another step against US meddling when he ended Ecuadorean participation in a US-sponsored military program – commonly referred to as the 'School of the Americas' – that has trained thousands of Latin American military officials over the years, many of whom led or participated in coups against civilian elected governments.

The Correa government played a leading role in new regional organizations such as UNASUR, even providing it with a home for a permanent secretariat in Quito. Correa is a vocal proponent of CELAC, a new move toward hemispheric integration that explicitly excluded Canada and the United States, as a replacement for the OAS, which he criticized as being dominated by the powers to the north. Even as social movements pressured Correa to move leftward, in terms of international policies his administration seemed to be staking out the most leftist position of any American government.

Correa's most dramatic stance against the big powers came with the granting of asylum to Julian Assange – the founder of WikiLeaks – in the Ecuadorean embassy in London in August 2012. When the British government threatened to invade the embassy, Correa, in an address to the Ecuadorean people, said, 'I don't know who they think I am or what they think our government is. But how could they expect us to yield to their threats or cower before them? My friends, they don't know who they are dealing with.' He added: 'They haven't found out that the Americas are free and sovereign and that we don't accept meddling and colonialism of any kind.'

South America rallied behind him. The UNASUR foreign ministers met in Guayaquil, expressing 'solidarity' with Correa, while ALBA warned of 'grave consequences' if Britain breached the territorial integrity of the Ecuadorean embassy.

Extractive enterprises

Correa maintained that extractive economic activities would boost the economy, provide more employment, contribute to spending for social programs, and that all of this could be accomplished without negative environmental ramifications. The president sought to promote responsible mining endeavors that benefitted both the government and

local communities. 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 mining and petroleum production would generate to fund important social programs.

In December 2007, Correa rejoined OPEC, joining Venezuela as one of two South American members. Ecuador originally enrolled in the cartel in 1973 but left in 1992 under the mandate of conservative president Sixto Duran-Ballen, who complained about the \$2 million membership fee and limits on production quotas.²³ Although Ecuador was OPEC's smallest producer, the effort to regain control over the productive output of the country and build international alliances was a significant gesture. Correa also began to renegotiate contracts with private petroleum companies in order to keep more profits in the country. The state-owned oil company Petroecuador, which dated to 1972, did not operate with the same level of autonomy that plagued Chávez in Venezuela before he brought that country's state oil company PDVSA under his control in 2003. Nevertheless, Correa did engage in pitched battles with Petroecuador administrators for what he criticized as their inefficient and laissez-faire attitudes toward managing the company. In August 2011, Correa threatened to follow a neoliberal playbook and privatize Petroecuador unless the company adopted new technologies to increase production. At the same time, he announced the restructuring of state companies in order to rid them of inefficient bureaucracies and increase profits.²⁴

In pursuing these policies, Correa once again could be seen as taking a cue from Chávez's playbook in Venezuela. In what some commentators derisively termed petro populism, both governments sought to use petroleum rents to fund social programs. Extractive-industry-driven growth policies, however, commonly run into local opposition, and Ecuador was no exception. Correa's arguments failed to persuade many opponents, who remained unconvinced of the likelihood of the materialization of the promised benefits of mining. Although Ecuador's new 2008 constitution codified much of what popular movements and others on the political left had long demanded, including reasserting government control over oil, mining, transport, telecommunications, and other economic sectors that previous governments had privatized, Correa's concrete policy objectives of expanding and developing mining industries and other extractive enterprises led to growing tensions with rural communities. These communities agitated for prior and informed

consent before mining activities could proceed on their lands, while Correa wanted the federal government to retain the right to decide when and where mining operations could take place.²⁵ The constitution conceded that communities had the right to consultation, but extractive endeavors would not be subject to their consent or veto power. This decision was a major blow to the power of social movements.

Anti-mining activist Carlos Zorrilla argued that exporting raw materials and importing finished projects back into the country continued patterns of economic dependency that could be traced back to the colonial period. Furthermore, he contended that '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.'²⁶ 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 to provide its primary source of income, with all of the resulting liabilities and complications that this position implied.²⁷ Given the dirty legacy of petroleum extraction in the Amazon, environmentalists readily recognized that those who bore the brunt of ecological impacts of extractive enterprises rarely realized its economic benefits.

While rural communities criticized Correa for pursuing policies that flowed against their interests, some of the strongest denunciations of the president's policies came from former allies. Economist Pablo Dávalos, who worked with Correa in the Ministry of Finance under the previous Alfredo Palacio government, complained that 'the new political system is more vertical, more hierarchical, and more dependent on the president than before.' Dávalos argued that Correa's 'government is far from a leftist government and corresponds more closely to the interests of powerful groups that are emerging with the new mining and agro-fuels sectors.'²⁸ The economist Alberto Acosta, former minister of mines and president of the 2008 constituent assembly and originally one of Correa's closest allies, also 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*, a Quechua concept that privileged human needs over those of capital. Many critics did not call for an end to mineral extraction, but they were opposed to new large-scale mining plans that continued pre-existing extractivist paradigms. 'We are obligated to optimize the extraction of petroleum without causing environmental and social damage,' Acosta argued. Ecuador needed to realize the highest possible social benefit

from each barrel of oil extracted, instead of focusing only on maximizing production. 'We have to learn,' he continued, 'exporting natural resources had not led to development.' Rather, 'the principal factor in production and development is the human being.' Ecuador had to change, Acosta insisted, 'that vision that condemns our countries to be producers and exporters of raw materials' that historically had underdeveloped economies in the developing world.²⁹ Embracing the *sumak kawsay* needed to move beyond rhetoric and vague platitudes to a pursuit of alternative development models. Underlying these conflicts were different concepts of the state, and in particular the role of social participation in decisions over public policy.

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 Huaorani, who had gained little from the petroleum economy. In November 2007, a simmering dispute at Yasuní boiled to the surface. In the town of Dayuma, local inhabitants protesting against oil exploitation seized control of several oil wells. They demanded support for economic development and environmental protections for Indigenous communities. Correa responded with a heavy hand, deploying the military to stop the dissidents and accusing the protestors of being unpatriotic saboteurs. The government arrested forty-five people and charged them with terrorism for attempting to disrupt petroleum extraction.³⁰ Correa appeared determined to destroy any independent social movement organizing that could potentially raise opposition to his government.

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' comprised of 'fundamentalists' who had joined forces with political conservatives in an attempt to undermine his government. 'We are not allied with the right,' Humberto Cholango, president of the militant Indigenous organization Ecuarunari, retorted. Instead, Indigenous 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.³¹

Correa's critiques of environmentalists and Indigenous movements were not that different from those of right-wing neoliberal governments, including his counterpart Alan García in Peru, who framed opposition

to extractive models as an attack on modernity and denounced those who opposed him as lazy and irrational people who were controlled by outside interests. Furthermore, his repressive responses to resistance also seemed little different from those of previous governments, and for Indigenous and environmental activists committed to sustainable development Correa's actions ultimately revealed his true colors. Opponents criticized Correa for betraying 'signs of subscribing to the most radical proposals of colonial territoriality in recent years.'³² This included his desire to open spaces to mining and increase petroleum extraction. In response, Correa called on his opponents to respect the law. 'No more strikes, no more violence,' he said. 'Everything through dialogue, nothing by force.'³³ He indicated that he would not be swayed by social movement pressure.³⁴ The president contended that the protestors 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 his extractive policies, and that this translated into electoral endorsement of his government.³⁵ Nevertheless, Correa's efforts to restrict the actions of social movements led to charges that he was attempting to criminalize political protest. More than any other issue, the conflicts over mining illustrated the wide, growing, and seemingly insurmountable gap between Correa and 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 water bill was part of what activists interpreted as broader governmental moves to privatize the country's natural resources, with a particular emphasis on oil extraction and large-scale mining projects. The cut flower and mining industries in particular required access to large amounts of water that came at a cost to local communities. Correa retorted that charges of water privatization were based on lies, and that his proposal had no such intent. He continued to insist that the proposed legislation prohibited the privatization of water, but rather was needed to regulate water supplies. Social movements, he contended, were trying to destabilize his government, and they 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.³⁶ The demonstrations 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 June in the Peruvian Amazon that resulted in dozens of fatalities, the Ecuadorean demonstration also grew deadly with the shooting of Shuar schoolteacher Bosco Wisum while dozens more were injured. The death of Wisum seemed to shock Correa, who called for the violence to stop.³⁷

Further alienating environmentalists, in January 2010 Correa backpedaled on a proposal to halt petroleum exploration in the Yasuni National Park in exchange for international funding for development programs. Experts estimated that the Ishpingo Tiputini Tambococha or ITT oilfields could generate \$7 billion a year. Extracting the crude, however, would threaten the park's biodiversity, release 400 million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and place two Indigenous groups in the park, the Tagaeri and Taromenane, in danger from exposure to the outside world. Several European countries agreed to provide half of the value of the petroleum over a period of ten years to support healthcare, education, and other social programs if the government left the oil in the ground. While environmental groups and Indigenous allies applauded the proposal as a brave and innovative step, foreign governments were not immediately forthcoming with the cash needed to make the program viable. Despite promising talks, the conservative German government of Angela Merkel withdrew from the proposal because of Ecuador's alliances with objectionable governments. Meanwhile, Correa, who had never given the program his unequivocal support, complained that the proposal came at a cost to Ecuador's sovereignty, and he threatened to allow transnational energy companies to commence drilling operations in the park.

Organizing protests against extractive policies led to terrorism charges against about two hundred activists. In the most high-profile case, four Indigenous leaders – CONAIE president Marlon Santi and vice-president Pepe Acacho, Ecuatorunari president Delfín Tenesaca, and president Marco Guatemal of the Federación Indígena y Campesina de Imbabura (FICI, Indigenous and Campesino Federation of Imbabura) – faced charges for leading protest marches against water and mining acts at a June 2010 ALBA summit in Ecuador. 'This government has declared war on Indigenous peoples,' Tenesaca proclaimed as he denounced the charges as a mechanism of social control.³⁸ A profound and growing divide emerged between Correa's authoritarian extractivism and Indigenous concepts of the *sumak kawsay*. From an Indigenous

perspective, this conflict concerned not only material factors of agrarian economies and environmental issues, but also ideological threats to Indigenous cosmologies.

The president became, as some observed, a manager of a state-run capitalism. 'Correa advocates a statist model of development that allows for no real popular participation,' social critic René Báez notes. 'His actions are a violation of the new constitution. Workers, teachers, indigenous organizations, and ecologists have no say in this government.'³⁹ Correa's policies and style of government led to a growing distance from social movements. The tensions between Correa and social movements were part of a much larger dance between different paths to power in which strategies and ideologies conflicted as much as they coincided, often with bitter accusations being cast across a widening and seemingly insurmountable divide.

Whither Ecuador?

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 was eager to embrace the social movement process and the broader left, he was also more removed from that political trajectory than his counterparts. Hugo Chávez, for example, had a long history of organizing for revolutionary change within the Venezuelan military. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was a union leader in Brazil before becoming president, and in Bolivia Evo Morales kept his leadership position as head of the coca growers' union even after winning the presidency. Uruguayan president José Mujica was an ex-guerrilla. Paraguay's president Fernando Lugo was a Catholic bishop influenced by liberation theology who had long worked with poor and marginalized communities. In Nicaragua Daniel Ortega led the Sandinistas to power in the 1970s. In comparison, as *The Economist* aptly observed, with a doctorate in economics from the University of Illinois and fluent in French and English, Correa was 'an unlikely revolutionary.'⁴⁰ He had only a tenuous connection to powerful and well-organized social movements that repeatedly rocked Ecuador's political landscape, and his combative attitudes toward their leaders strained those relations even further.

Was Correa justifiably included as part of a leftward tilt in Latin America, or was his inclusion in this pantheon just a result of rhetoric or hopeful thinking? Analysts now talk of Latin America's 'many lefts.'⁴¹ As Michael Shifter, the vice-president of the Inter-American Dialogue,

notes, Latin America 'is swinging in many different directions at the same time.' Despite Correa's attempts to emulate Chávez's strategies, his policies were not nearly as radical as those of his Venezuelan or Bolivian counterparts. Of the many lefts that gained power in Latin America, Correa represented a moderate and ambiguous position closer to that of Lula in Brazil or the Concertación in Chile rather than Chávez's 'twenty-first-century socialism' or Morales's 'communitarian socialism.' As Shifter notes, Correa's policies 'reflected less the embrace of leftism than a desire for a new kind of politics.'⁴² Even the business-friendly *Latin American Weekly Report* questioned how radical his reforms really were. 'More investment in health, education and anti-poverty programs, certainly,' they observe. '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,' they conclude.⁴³ It was in this context that a mobilized and engaged social movement remained important as a check on a personalistic and populist government. If Correa followed through on any of the hopeful promises of his government, it would be due to this pressure from below and to the left.

Correa remains the most popular politician in Ecuador in decades, owing in no small part to the positive social programs he enacted. Furthermore, the disparate opposition lacked leaders from either the left or the right who could begin to approach the president's level of popularity. For social movements, Correa potentially remained a strong ally because he struck at the entrenched oligarchy's bases of power, and perhaps he was the best that they could hope for at this juncture in history. As Emir Sader contends, the task is to criticize the government for its mistakes but also support its positive moves and to make a common front against the right.⁴⁴ The contradictions and tradeoffs that activists face in Ecuador are part of a broader dilemma that much of the rest of the Latin American left, as well as others around the globe, confronts. In the face of a seemingly unresolvable situation, it remained the responsibility of environmentalists, rural communities, social movements, and the left in general to push Correa in a positive direction in order to make more inclusive and participatory forms of government.

Mujeres Campesinas de Bolivia – Bartolina Sisa (FNMCB-BS, National Federation of Peasant Women of Bolivia – Bartolina Sisa), Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia (CSCB, Confederation of Colonizers' Unions of Bolivia), Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB, Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia) and Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ, National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu).

35 Sivak, 'The Bolivianisation of Washington–La Paz relations', p. 172.

36 'Fundamental principles of the People's Trade Treaty – TCP,' ALBA-TCP website, alba-tcp.org/en/contenido/fundamental-principles-tcp.

37 Redacción Bolpress, 'Sudamérica siglo XXI: trascender UNASUR y crear un "Estado región,"' *Bolpress*, 27 May 2011, www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2011052702.

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6 Ecuador's socialism

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