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Journal of Democracy, Volume 12, Number 2, April 2001, pp. 59-73 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: 10.1353/jod.2001.0032



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High Anxiety in the Andes

CRISIS AND CONTENTION IN ECUADOR

José Antonio Lucero

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Ecuador has just emerged from its 54th state of emergency in 21 difficult years of democratic rule.¹ As in other Andean countries, economic trouble, political instability, and social unrest make democracy look far from secure. Yet, despite perpetual crisis, Ecuador has somehow avoided both the internal warfare that afflicts Colombia (its northern neighbor) and the authoritarian excesses of Peru (its neighbor to the south). A look at the events of the past year in Ecuador reveals some of the peculiarities of continuing crisis in this Andean republic.

On 21 January 2000, organizations of indigenous peoples and sections of the Ecuadorian military capped weeks of national protests with a bloodless coup against the “neoliberal and antipopular” government of President Jamil Mahuad. This was the second time in three years that a democratically elected president was ousted before finishing his term. (Abdalá Bucaram had been deposed by the Congress in 1997 on the grounds of “mental incapacity.”) In Mahuad’s place, an army general, the president of the Confederation of Ecuadorian Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE), and a former head of the Supreme Court installed themselves collectively as a government of “National Salvation.” This “triumvirate” lasted for only a few hours, as General Carlos Mendoza, under heavy international pressure, abandoned the other two members of the junta and handed over authority to Mahuad’s vice-president, Gustavo Noboa.

A year later, Noboa remained president, but 2001 began much as had 2000, with thousands of indigenous protesters paralyzing the nation’s

roads in protest of the same set of neoliberal policies that Mahuad had sought to implement. This time, however, the armed forces were on the side of the state, not society. Employing greater repressive force than had previously been used in this protest-prone but usually nonviolent country, the government sought to quell the demonstrations. This strategy proved ineffective, however, and the state found itself negotiating with indigenous groups that displayed both organizational might and broad national and international support.

As is so often the case, it is best to begin with the economy. "Choices of economic strategy can never guarantee safe arrival across disaster-strewn seas," writes economist John Sheahan, "but they can lessen many common kinds of danger or, even more easily, ensure shipwreck."² Unfortunately for Ecuadorians, recent policies seem to have made shipwreck all too apt a metaphor. The limited gains from state-led developmentalism under military governments in the 1960s and 1970s and from neoliberal reforms under civilian governments in the 1980s and 1990s had left the export-oriented Ecuadorian economy ill-prepared to navigate the dangers of declining oil prices, banking-sector mismanagement, and severe currency crises. Between 1998 and 2000, Ecuador suffered its worst economic reversals in a century. In the course of these two years, GNP shrank 7.3 percent, foreign investment fell by 34.7 percent, imports declined by 38.4 percent, and the value of the dollar against the sucre rose by 362 percent. Ecuador bled not only capital but also people, as almost 10 percent of the country's 12 million inhabitants emigrated. Contributing to all these woes was a severe banking crisis. In 1998 there were 42 banks in Ecuador; by 2000 there were only 26. Efforts to bail out the sinking banking sector have absorbed roughly 23 percent of GNP, placing a fiscal strain on the state and diverting resources from social spending. With over 70 percent of the population currently below the poverty line, it comes as little surprise that the United Nations currently ranks Ecuador as the poorest country in the hemisphere.³

Equally serious political problems have accompanied these economic troubles. Not only have the last two elected presidents failed to serve out their full terms, but the legislature and political parties also find themselves in comparable states of disarray. According to 1999 polling data, only 6 percent of the population support political parties, and a meager 11 percent have faith in the Congress. Ecuador's multiparty system is one of the weakest in Latin America. Perhaps more disturbing, only 28 percent of Ecuadorians believe that democracy is able to solve their problems.⁴ By almost any standard, Ecuadorian democracy is in poor shape.

Moreover, if one views Ecuadorian society in the light of scholarly studies on democratization, the prospects for democratic consolidation seem bleak. The wisdom that emerged from the "transitology"

scholarship of the 1980s held that a “resurrected civil society” was a fine thing for initiating transitions but was dangerous if it got in the way of the delicate processes of pacting and crafting new democracies. This argument owes much to Samuel P. Huntington’s 1966 classic *Political Order in Changing Societies*, but the logic goes back at least to Hobbes: Weak sovereigns and strong societies are a dangerous combination. In Ecuador, this combination seems particularly perilous. In addition to the weakness of its institutions, Ecuador has one of the most contentious societies in the Americas. It leads the hemisphere in the number of national strikes and demonstrations per year.

Over the past decade, ethnicity and regionalism have been the main fault lines of Ecuadorian politics. Indigenous (and to a much lesser extent, Afro-Ecuadorian) organizations have challenged the reigning myth that there exists a single Ecuadorian *mestizo* (mixed-blood) nationality. Ecuador is arguably home to the strongest and best-organized indigenous movement in Latin America, which has become closely identified, even at times synonymous, with one organization—la Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, or CONAIE). The massive marches, blockades, and protests that became known as the June 1990 *levantamiento* (uprising) marked the dramatic reentrance of indigenous people onto the national stage of Ecuadorian politics. During the past decade, CONAIE-led protests have blocked the Pan-American highway on an almost yearly basis and made interprovincial travel impossible, forcing governments to negotiate on the institutional structure of the state, to scale back neoliberal reforms, and to change the constitution to recognize the pluricultural composition of the country and create a new regime of collective rights.⁵ Indigenous people, long at the margins of political life (until 1979, Spanish literacy requirements kept the approximately 40 percent of Ecuadorians who largely speak indigenous languages away from the polls), are now important actors in national politics. Their role in the January 2000 coup—or “rebellion,” as CONAIE characterizes it—has been seen as either the high point of the movement (Antonio Vargas, president of CONAIE, after all stood at the upper echelon of state power) or a serious setback (Vargas and the triumvirate lasted in power for only three hours).

Ecuadorian politics has also revolved around the divisions among the country’s three geographic regions—the coast, the Andean highlands (or sierra), and the Amazonian lowlands. Although these are not the administrative divisions of the state, which is divided into 22 provinces, they have, over time, acquired real importance as seemingly “natural” political and economic communities. During most of Ecuador’s republican history, politics pitted the modernizing, agro-exporting elites of the coast against the landed political elites of the sierra. The Amazon region was at the margins of Ecuadorian politics until the late twentieth century, when it attracted national attention due to border conflicts with

Peru and the discovery of major oil deposits in the 1970s. Today the division between coast and sierra still remains the major regional cleavage, as economic power is concentrated in coastal Guayaquil's agro-export and banking sectors, while political power is centralized in the highland capital of Quito. Ecuadorian regionalism permeates public life in everything from news broadcasts (always with Guayaquil *and* Quito anchors) to presidential tickets (Jamil Mahuad was the mayor of *highland* Quito; Gustavo Noboa, his vice-president, was rector of the Catholic University in *coastal* Guayaquil).

The Fall of Mahuad

A closer look at the events surrounding the January 2000 coup provides a clearer sense of the patterns of crisis in Ecuador. The rash of bank failures was unquestionably the catalyst of this latest crisis. In order to understand how a financial catastrophe became a political and social crisis, it is important to examine the policies of President Jamil Mahuad, who came to office in August of 1998 with the promise that Ecuador would "leave the crisis behind." That crisis, as Mahuad often stated, was the product of years of macroeconomic mismanagement and a series of external shocks (both climatic, like El Niño, and economic, like falling commodity prices and external credit scarcity). Yet Mahuad's policies seemed only to add fuel to the fire. Within weeks of taking office, the Banco de Prestamos became the first of many national banks to fail. By the end of 1998, four major banks, including the nation's largest financial institution, had failed. Eventually, the government would bail out 18 financial institutions.

Between August 1998 and December 1999, the Mahuad government transferred \$6 billion to the banking sector, roughly 23 percent of annual GNP. Economist Wilma Salgado notes that this is roughly the amount that the Ecuadorian state had spent on education over the last 13 years, on health for the last 39 years, and on agricultural development for the last 42 years. This concerted effort to save the banks had deleterious economic and social effects.⁶ The increased monetary emissions needed to cover the cost of the bailout led to a plunge in the value of the sucre. Internal debt rose 39 percent, and interest payments on the debt soared from 1 percent of GNP in 1998 to 5 percent in 1999. To offset the increase in expenditures and debt, cuts were made in social spending, which fell in real terms by 50 percent in 1999. Meanwhile, the minimum wage fell by 25 percent in real terms, and unemployment doubled. The poorest sectors of society have borne the heaviest burden, as evidenced by a Gini coefficient of .58, making Ecuador the third most unequal society in Latin America (after Brazil and Paraguay). This transfer of resources from social spending toward bailing out the banks invited charges that Ecuador under Mahuad had become, in Peter Evans's phrase, a "predatory

state,” one that does not foster production but rather seeks to redistribute resources for the benefit of a few elites.⁷

Popular opposition mounted against Mahuad, who, unlike Bucaram, had previously counted among his strengths a corruption-free record of public service. Mahuad’s image as an honest “technopol” quickly became tarnished in late 1999 as news broke that his campaign had received \$3 million from Fernando Aspiazú, a coastal businessman and former president of the Banco del Progreso, which had been taken over by the state at a cost of approximately \$1 billion. The massive bank bailout thus became linked to an all-too-familiar narrative of oligarchic politics as usual. Mahuad, who had enjoyed popularity levels of 60 percent after signing a peace treaty with Peru, Ecuador’s old enemy to the south, suddenly found his approval ratings reduced to single digits. An economic crisis had become a full-blown crisis of legitimacy.

In this hour of crisis, Mahuad made a dramatic decision to replace the weakening sucre with the U.S. dollar in hopes of reassuring foreign investors and the IMF. While the proclamation boosted Mahuad’s approval ratings for a while, it also made clear to critics of the government’s neoliberal policies that there would be no change in direction. Moreover, it did little to reassure the general population of the state’s ability to handle the crisis, as dollarization effectively meant that monetary policy would be set not by Ecuadorian decision makers but by U.S. Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan. Confidence in Mahuad and the political system in general quickly evaporated. The director of the polling firm CEDATOS put the point bluntly in January 2000: “None of the powers of the state—the executive branch, Congress, or the judiciary—is now trusted by the people.”⁸

It came as little surprise, then, that CONAIE and other social movement organizations called for drastic changes. On 11 January 2000, the Parlamento de los Pueblos (Parliament of Peoples) was created, consisting of 800 delegates from the 22 provinces and various civil-society organizations. This parliament proclaimed itself a transitional representative body until a new government was formed. From this “parliamentary” space, it called for continued civil disobedience to protest the neoliberal policies of Jamil Mahuad.

CONAIE called for another national *levantamiento*, and indigenous rural communities (mostly from the central sierra) prepared to block the Pan-American highway and to travel (by foot if necessary) to Quito. The Mahuad government mobilized security forces to keep the roads open and the Indians away from the capital. When over 10,000 protesters concentrated in Quito on 19 January 2000, however, it became clear that the security forces had failed. On January 21, with the military waving indigenous protesters on and creating wooden bridges to enable them to scale the barbed wire surrounding government buildings, the protesters entered the very heart of the Ecuadorian state.

On that same day, army Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, CONAIE president Antonio Vargas, and former Supreme Court chief Carlos Solórzano proclaimed themselves a Junta of National Salvation. Indigenous leader Vargas described the “rebellion” in the following terms:

The Ecuadorian people [*pueblo*] have triumphed. This time we are not going to cheat you as the political parties have always done. This time we are with the people. We, the Junta of the Government of National Salvation, are the servants of the Ecuadorian people, not authorities or chiefs. . . . The unity of the Ecuadorian people and the military . . . has produced a revolution without blood. We are going to work with the ethic we espouse: *ama quilla, ama shua, ama llulla*; this will be the motto of all the elements of the Ecuadorian state. That is, do not lie, do not steal, and do not be idle.⁹

In the end, however, the junta lasted less than a day. Rather than reconstructing the state, it succeeded only in removing a president. General Carlos Mendoza, who during the course of the day’s events had replaced Colonel Gutiérrez in the junta, handed over power to Gustavo Noboa, Mahuad’s vice-president.¹⁰ Since his ascension to power, Noboa has continued with dollarization and accelerated privatization plans, brokering a deal with the IMF for further funds. Despite the fact that the “revolution” had resulted in no change in governmental policy, CONAIE viewed it as a victory for the indigenous movement, which had risen, albeit briefly, to the heights of political power.

Colonels and Indians

At first blush, a military-indigenous movement surely seems based on a strange alliance. In South America, one is not accustomed to seeing soldiers and social movements on the same side of political struggles. Yet in Ecuador, progressive elements of a reformist military and indigenous organizations with a broadening agenda have found common ground. Moreover, both CONAIE and the armed forces enjoy wide social support. In early 1999, the church, the military, and CONAIE were the institutions that Ecuadorians trusted most (see the Table on the facing page). If one compares their levels of support with those registered by Congress and political parties, one understands why Indians and colonels are more consequential than parties and parliaments.

This support continued throughout the events of 2000. CEDATOS polls showed that indigenous movements and the armed forces enjoyed much higher standing than elected officials did. In a nationwide survey, respondents were asked to rank various institutions on a scale of 1 to 100. “Only the family, the Catholic Church, the armed forces, universities, social movements, and the media were given a score above 50 by respondents, who ranked democracy, the banks, the government, the justice system, Congress, and political parties below 15.”¹¹ Other polling

TABLE—FAITH IN CIVIL AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (PERCENTAGES)

<i>"In which of the following institutions do you have the most faith?"</i>	
Church	28.44
Military	25.97
CONAIE	12.66
Government	2.66
Unions	2.30
Congress	0.94
Parties	0.78

Source: *El Hoy* (Quito), 2 January 1999.

data revealed that 71 percent of Ecuadorians supported the indigenous mobilization and 74 percent approved of the takeover of Congress. At the same time, however, 79 percent supported preserving the constitutional order. Another indication of popular ambivalence is the fact that most Ecuadorians did not themselves participate in the “popular rebellion,” but rather chose to watch the mostly indigenous

and rural protesters on television. Moreover, the upper and middle classes in the northern part of Quito carried on (in much smaller numbers) their own pro-Mahuad demonstration, which the media dubbed the “march of the turned-off cell phones.” Many of the pro-Mahuad protesters chanted, “We are not Indians.”¹²

Both the Indians and the military had clear reasons to dislike Mahuad. CONAIE believed that his dollarization and privatization policies would adversely affect them by bolstering an economy based on primary goods that relies on keeping labor inexpensive and flexible. Dollarization, bank bailouts, and privatization were measures largely designed to assure investors that Ecuador was a safe place for their money; these measures did nothing to alleviate galloping poverty or inequality. Indeed, it is quite clear that in the short term they made things worse. The military had other complaints against Mahuad. As far as the armed forces were concerned, the economic crisis had hurt the defense budget, and the peace treaty with Peru seemed to eliminate much of the military’s *raison d’être*. Moreover, the military’s traditional image as a popular, nationalist institution meant that it often saw itself as something of a check on presidential power. In 1997, the military’s unwillingness to support President Bucaram had been crucial to his removal from office.

As President Mahuad’s popularity plummeted, he received an increasing number of messages from the upper echelons of the military signaling their dissatisfaction and suggesting ways he might reestablish control. Personal animosity between Mahuad’s defense minister and the military high command made civil-military relations even more tense. It is important, as Catherine Walsh points out, to distinguish the motivations of the young *colonels* who began the trouble in January from the *generals* who brought the trouble to an end.

The colonels, who tend to come from working-class backgrounds and whose nationalist imagination was fired by the success of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, seem to share the skepticism of the indigenous organizations toward a neoliberalism more concerned with investor confidence than with poverty rates—or defense budgets, for that matter. The generals, by contrast, usually come from wealthy families, and

although many are sympathetic to reformist ideologies, they did not see January as a moment to change development models. Their actions seemed to reveal a desire to remove Mahuad from office rather than to reverse his policies.

It is not surprising that an alliance developed between CONAIE and the colonels, for they shared a somewhat similar worldview. Yet, neither is it surprising that the high command, while happy to allow Mahuad to be removed, would not risk the cutoff of U.S. aid that Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Peter Romero threatened would come if the junta remained in power.

The Ecuadorian military, unlike many others in Latin America, has not practiced widespread dirty-war tactics like those that terrorized Brazil and Argentina. During the 1960s and 1970s, Ecuador had two statist, reformist, and nationalist military governments that pursued sweeping agrarian reforms and nationalized the oil industry. Ecuador's military has long viewed itself as a popular institution that fights against not only external enemies but also oligarchic elements at home. As former Ecuadorian president Osvaldo Hurtado explains, "The progressive position . . . of the Ecuadorian military . . . is not a recent phenomenon. In reality, it goes back to a previous historic period and begins with the *Revolución Juliana* (Revolution of July 1925)." That "revolution" was a movement against the abuses of the "bankocracy of Guayaquil." In fact, "Juliano" military governments in the 1920s and 1930s were pioneers in working to secure certain social and political rights in Ecuador. Thus it was not a shock to hear one of the colonels of 2000 explicitly invoke the 1925 struggle against the "bankocracy." On 21 January 2000, Colonel Fausto Cabo pledged not only that no bullets would be fired during this historic uprising but that, with the junta in power, "the *Revolución Juliana* will take form."¹³

Just as in 1925, the impact of regional divisions on Ecuadorian politics is unmistakable. The coastal oligarchy (along with the bad loans that it financed) is once more being painted as the real threat to the Ecuadorian nation, and once again the mostly highland military views itself as coming to rescue the nation from ruin. Nor was this message lost on the coastal populations. On the weekend of the coup, in a coincidence that could hardly have been more timely, the voters of the coastal province of Guayas overwhelmingly (85 percent) supported a move toward greater autonomy in a non-binding referendum on decentralization. During the events in Quito on January 21, Gustavo Noboa, then vice-president of Ecuador, was in Guayaquil to vote in this very referendum. Thus at the very moment when coastal residents of Guayas were voting to move away from the chaos of the sierra, highland Indians voted with their feet to support the military in a neo-Julianian effort to end the abuses of the coastal bankocracy.

For the indigenous movement, the events of 2000 marked a change

in tactics, especially regarding their participation in what looked very much like a military coup. Certainly, the military has worked with indigenous organizations before, especially in the Amazon region, where the military has often been the only state actor around.¹⁴ Yet what is striking about the events of January 2000 is the shift from CONAIE's usual strategy of broad-based organizing, protest, and negotiation to one of palace revolutions and elite pacts.

Since its founding in 1986, CONAIE has emerged as the most visible and representative indigenous confederation, bringing together indigenous organizations from the coastal, highland, and Amazonian regions of the country. From the beginning, CONAIE sought to find its own path, accepting the help of like-minded nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, but steering clear of political parties and electoral politics. It made an explicit choice to limit its action to civil society. CONAIE fostered a thriving alternative public sphere, coordinated the largest protests of the century, and seemed to be proceeding according to the Gramscian pace suitable to a war of position. Through organizational and agitational activity, indigenous organizations like CONAIE succeeded in changing the political culture of Ecuador from one in which Indians literally had to ride in the back of buses to a pluricultural one in which Indians occupy public office at every level.

This kind of strategy has characterized rural movements throughout the continent. Indeed, with a few exceptions (Colombia being the most notable), the current historical moment in Latin America is one not of armed revolutions and coups but of social movements. Even Mexico's ostensibly armed Zapatistas have waged their most important battle in the pages of the *New York Times*, not in the Lacandona jungle. The language and tactics of leftist revolutionary movements are not as viable as they were during the Cold War. Moreover, most contemporary social actors (like indigenous movements) have themselves broken with the old language of class warfare and looked to new arenas like international law, NGO networks, and international organizations of social scientists to secure support for their social struggles. This approach creates new possibilities but also establishes certain limits on the range of strategies that indigenous organizations can adopt. The fact that so many indigenous organizations depend on foreign (mostly European) funding further commits them to working within what we have come to think of as civil society. CONAIE's participation in the coup forced funders like IBIS (Denmark) to suspend their support, since Danish policy expressly forbids funding the overthrow of any government.¹⁵

While the January revolt was indeed bloodless and the People's Parliament was full of democratic promise, the overthrow of Mahuad was far from an exercise in democratic politics. As is usually the case with coups, a relatively small number of individuals (colonels and CONAIE leaders)

planned the January events, making decisions first and consulting their bases later. Moreover, as part of the deal struck by CONAIE with the military, some left-leaning social-movement organizations seem to have been explicitly excluded from events. Other indigenous and popular organizations were included in protests but not in planning. The indigenous movement, however, is keenly aware of the need to reflect critically on its protest strategies. Immediately after the overthrow of Mahuad, indigenous leaders within and outside of CONAIE called for a “bath of truth,” in which public discussion would take the place of backroom meetings.

A New Round of Protests

With Noboa acceding to the presidency, many began to feel cautious optimism about the effort to revive the economy. Noboa was able to work with both Mahuad’s old party, Popular Democracy, and the conservative Social Christian party in pushing through a set of major economic reforms officially known as the Laws of Economic Transformation (I and II). These are more popularly known as the Trolley Laws, presumably due to the number of riders in the legislation and the fast track on which they moved. Trolley I revised the Ecuadorian constitution to allow dollarization; Trolley II set the stage for extensive privatization of state enterprises. These laws seem to have bolstered the confidence of business managers, 98 percent of whom reported that they were optimistic about Ecuador’s future.¹⁶ The indigenous and popular sectors, however, feared that they would bear the brunt of policies that would eliminate state subsidies during extremely difficult economic times.

Thus, for the second year in a row, indigenous and popular organizations organized massive January protests. Unlike the situation in January 2000, however, this time hard-line elements within the government seemed to set the tone for the state response. Even before the state of emergency was declared, several indigenous and labor leaders, including CONAIE president Antonio Vargas and Popular Front leader Luis Villacis, were arrested in late January and early February. The president of the Popular Parliament, Salvador Quishpe, who narrowly escaped police, declared that the rash of arrests would only make the situation worse. Police surrounded thousands of indigenous protesters who had been allowed to camp at the Salesian Polytechnic University in Quito. The government cut off water and electricity supplies to the university and blocked food donations. Police fired tear gas directly at protesters, injuring and arresting dozens.¹⁷

The confrontation intensified on 5 February 2001 when soldiers fired on indigenous protesters in the Amazonian city of Tena in Napo province, killing at least three people and injuring 23 others. A radio station that

had reported the violence was quickly closed by the military, and the state aggressively discouraged the press from engaging in “sensationalism” by reporting the various confrontations throughout the country. Later the same day, police forces began a raid to evict the 5,000 indigenous protesters camping at the Salesian Polytechnic University. The protestors managed to close the gates of the university, but police then brought in reinforcements and surrounded the campus. Violent clashes between protestors and police were also reported throughout the central highlands. Dialogue between indigenous organizations and the state, which had only recently begun, was called off by indigenous leaders to protest the violence. With the government facing growing pressure from both inside and outside the country, the talks resumed on February 6. The press reported that a national strike was set to begin the next day, and condemnation of the government grew as news spread of the repression. Intense talks ended late on the night of February 6, with both sides nearing a tentative agreement, which was finalized and signed the next day.

President Noboa, two other state officials, and six presidents of national indigenous and peasant federations signed the 23-point agreement. Like previous agreements, it combined concrete cost-of-living measures with more ambitious institutional promises. The government made concessions on the price of gas and transportation, pledged a series of institutional commitments regarding sustainable development, and promised the creation of new spaces that would “allow for the collective construction of the solutions the country demands and that will forge a new kind of relationship between the state and indigenous people.”

Interestingly, the agreement also covered matters beyond the borders of Ecuador, including a government commitment to reject “the regionalization of Plan Colombia” and the involvement of Ecuador in foreign conflicts. The government agreed to provide assistance to migrants inside and outside the country and to arrange for international agencies to provide needed aid through local governments. It also reaffirmed its obligation to comply with constitutional and international provisions regulating the extraction of natural resources from the Amazon and extending special protection to indigenous peoples in the Amazon basin. The document also stipulated that resources acquired through the renegotiation of foreign debt would go to increased social spending.

The fact that the conflict ended through negotiation suggests that the Ecuadorian government continues to be less willing (or able) to resort to violent repression to push through economic reforms than its counterparts in Peru and Bolivia. While hard-line elements are clearly present in the Ecuadorian government, they seem unable at this time to set the policy agenda. Opposition to hard-line measures from abroad was significant, revealing the increased ability of indigenous

organizations to mobilize international support. Through an Internet campaign resembling that of the Zapatistas in Mexico, indigenous and nongovernmental organizations were able to frame the conflict as one of state terror versus pacific protest. Indigenous organizations sent daily e-mail reports to thousands of development professionals, human rights organizations, and concerned academics, who, in turn, passed on the messages to other receptive audiences.

Some of these reports from Ecuador evidenced remarkable sophistication. For example, one multimedia presentation, sent as an e-mail attachment, began with government minister Juan Manrique's request for "reasonable dialogue," followed by a series of photographic images juxtaposing bloodied, unarmed protesters and heavily armed soldiers. Such images powerfully belied the minister's call for reasonableness. Equipped with such information and images, sympathetic organizations in Europe and the United States were able to coordinate protests like the one that took place in front of the Ecuadorian embassy in Washington, D.C., on February 7. Meanwhile, the government palace in Quito was flooded with faxes, letters, and e-mails from all over the world. At least one minister privately confessed that this intense international opposition, especially after the reports of the deaths in Tena, isolated hard-line elements and pushed the president toward a negotiated solution.¹⁸

The continuing crisis in Ecuador should be viewed not only in a regional framework but also in a broader transnational context. After all, the economic policies that spurred the protests are widely seen as the imperial imposition of the International Monetary Fund. U.S. foreign policy is now commonly viewed in Ecuador as another source of instability that will regionalize rather than contain the conflict in Colombia. Finally, even the organization of protest is no longer limited to the mobilization of local communities but now relies more than ever on the powerful international reach of the Internet.

Social Movements and Democracy

It is important to ask whether the continuing contentiousness of society contributes to or weakens democracy in Ecuador. I am cautiously optimistic that, in the long run, indigenous mobilization will prove more a source of democratic deepening than of democratic breakdown. Theorists from Aristotle to Charles Tilly have argued that politics is not only about institutions but also about citizenship. Indian mobilization can be seen as contributing to the development of democratic citizenship in a state characterized by neocolonial social structures. The steady advance of indigenous social movements reflects a familiar historical pattern in which rights are constructed through contestation between ruler and ruled. It is through these conflicts—or to use Machiavelli's term, "tumults"—that ties and transactions are established between

citizens and the state. “[I]n every republic there are two different dispositions, that of the populace and that of the upper class, and . . . all legislation favourable to liberty is brought about by the clash between them.”¹⁹ Following T.H. Marshall, Tilly has argued that these ties and transactions have varied greatly from “thin” to “thicker” forms. The moving from thin to thick citizenship (or the reverse) is another way of thinking about regime change.²⁰

Some authors have argued that protest politics in Ecuador has not led to thicker ties between institutions and citizens: By working outside formal politics, social movements have crowded out the space for more institutionalized representation. Simón Pachano argues that labor and indigenous movements, by confronting the state directly and avoiding the intermediation of formal political institutions, have allowed representative institutions to atrophy. Thus the success of protest politics, in Pachano’s view, has made Ecuador’s polity a victim of “chaotic representation.”²¹

I believe that this view is wrong or at least misleading on two counts. First, it forgets that protest politics has been a response to an extremely long history of exclusion, during which institutional channels for interest mediation were almost nonexistent. To blame social movements for the poor representation delivered by parties seems to reverse cause and effect. Second, aside from the coup of January 2000 (which I think *was* a tactical error for the indigenous movement, but not a permanent setback), CONAIE and other indigenous organizations have been concerned precisely with the institutional architecture of the state. They have been active not only in the streets but also in the Congress, through a new electoral movement (the Pachakutik Pluricultural United Movement, or MUPP), and in the executive branch, through the creation of new agencies for bilingual education (DINEIB) and indigenous development (CODENPE). The shift from pure protest politics to a constructive concern with institutional reform and design holds the promise of creating “thicker” ties between indigenous populations and the state.

Most encouraging of all is the debate that is occurring within the indigenous movement itself. Not only CONAIE but also other popular organizations like the National Federation of Black, Indigenous and Peasant Organizations (FENOCIN) and the National Federation of Evangelical Indigenous Organizations (FEINE) have rediscovered the importance of broad popular organizing across regional, ethnic, religious, and ideological divides. The debate over the proper agenda, role, and tactics of a social movement contributes greatly both to fostering democracy within the indigenous organizations and to promoting a stronger ethic of responsibility within Ecuadorian society. Moreover, the establishment of new spaces for dialogue, like the various indigenous assemblies at local levels and the MUPP at the national level, increases the opportunities for Ecuadorians to practice the art of ruling and being ruled.²²

Ecuadorian democracy has long relied on a certain understanding between social movements and the state: Social protest is a legitimate form of popular expression, protests require negotiated solutions, and violence is relatively absent from contentious politics. Recent events show that this understanding may be weakening. During the past two years, Ecuador has faced the twin dangers of the Andean crisis: national disintegration through protracted civil strife and unchecked state violence deployed with the speed of executive decrees. With the February 2001 agreements, Ecuador seems once again to have narrowly escaped the worst, and the nation breathed a sigh of relief. Yet one worries whether next time—and in Ecuador, there will always be a next time—social movements will overestimate their power or hard-line voices in the state will be more persuasive in setting the agenda. One can only hope that popular organizations and state officials will take seriously their commitment to building new national spaces for dialogue to complement the local and international ones that have already been built. If these spaces can provide alternatives to national strikes and authoritarian politics, then Ecuador may have much to teach the world about the slow and painful process of decolonizing liberal democracy.

NOTES

Research for this article was funded by the National Science Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, Fulbright IIE, and Princeton University's Center for International Studies, Council on Regional Studies, and Program in Latin American Studies. Many thanks to John MacDougall and María Elena García for valuable suggestions on previous drafts.

1. This state of emergency was proclaimed on 2 February 2001 and repealed on 7 February 2001. Since Ecuador returned to democratic rule in 1979, it has averaged 2.6 states of emergency per year. To make matters worse, a recent study discovered that governments forgot to revoke 44 of those states of emergency. The consequences of this governmental forgetfulness were more severe before the enactment of the 1998 constitutional reforms, which placed a 60-day limit on states of emergencies. "El Ecuador, con 44 estados de emergencia vigentes," *El Hoy* (Quito), 11 February 2001, available online at www.hoy.com.ec.

2. John Sheahan, *Patterns of Development in Latin America* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 313.

3. Economic data are from "Country Profile Ecuador," Economist Intelligence Unit, 27 July 2000; Wilma Salgado, "La crisis económica y el 'gran salto al vacío' de la dolarización," *Ecuador Debate* 49 (April 2000): 7–24; and Catherine Walsh, "Perfiles de la crisis de la sociedad nacional ecuatoriana," paper presented at the conference "Ecuador 2000," Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 16–18 August 2000.

4. These data were collected by CEDATOS. They are cited in César Montufar, "Crisis, iniquidad, y el espectro predatorio del estado ecuatoriano," paper presented at the conference on "Ecuador 2000," Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 16–18 August 2000.

5. There are now government agencies for bilingual education (DINEIB) and indigenous development projects (CODENPE), and CONAIE leaders run both.

6. Wilma Salgado, "La crisis económica y el 'gran salto al vacío' de la dolarización," 8–12.
7. Cesar Montufar, "Crisis, iniquidad, y el espectro predatorio del estado ecuatoriano," 2–8.
8. Country Case Ecuador, 4. Polibio Córdoba, CEDATOS director, cited in Kintto Lucas, *La rebelión de los indios* (Quito: Abya Yala, 2000), 143.
9. Cited in Catherine E. Walsh, "The Ecuadorian Political Irruption: Uprisings, Coups, Rebellions, and Democracy," *Nepantla: Views from South 2* (Winter 2001): 171–201.
10. The military high command told the original junta members that if the military was to be a part of the new government, respect for the institutional hierarchy meant that a general, not a colonel, ought to be part of the triumvirate. CONAIE leaders were extremely reluctant to accept this, but after receiving many assurances from the military, they agreed at 11:40 p.m. to the change in the triumvirate. At 2:50 a.m., General Mendoza gave power back to Noboa, and Ecuador woke up the following day to a new president, Gustavo Noboa, the country's sixth president in five years.
11. Cited in Lucas, 142–43.
12. Cited in Walsh, "The Ecuadorian Political Irruption," 171–80.
13. Quoted in Brian Szemelski, *Imágenes Impresionantes: el levantamiento indígena-militar ecuatoriano*, Video Documentary, 2000.
14. In recent times, the military has even helped social-movement organizations in their mobilizations. During the 1992 march of the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Province of Pastaza (OPIP) from the Amazon to Quito, the military provided medical and logistical support. At the time, Antonio Vargas, the current president of CONAIE, was the president of OPIP.
15. Martin Scurrah, director of Oxfam America, interview with author, 17 March 2000.
16. Deloitte and Touche survey data, cited in "Ecuador: Back from the Brink," *The Economist*, 29 September 2000.
17. This account draws heavily on daily news reports from the *El Hoy* and *El Comercio* between January 22 and February 8, as well the useful synthesis of these reports in English in the *Weekly New Update on the Americas* 576 (11 February 2001).
18. Marc Saint-Upery, French journalist, personal correspondence, 12 February 2001.
19. Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, Leslie J. Walker, trans. (New York: Penguin, 1970), 113.
20. Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1833* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995). For more on citizenship and social movements, see José Antonio Lucero, "Feuds, Tumults, and Turns: Politics and Culture in Social Movement Theory," *Comparative Politics* 32 (January 2000): 231–49.
21. Simón Pachano, *La Representación Caotica* (Quito: FLACSO, 1995).
22. New pluricultural public spaces are emerging in cyberspace as well. The Scientific Institute of Indigenous Culture, headed by former CONAIE president Luis Macas, has published some very critical reflections in its new online bulletin *Rimay* (which means "speak" in Quichua). All past issues of *Rimay* may be found at <http://icci.nativeweb.org>.