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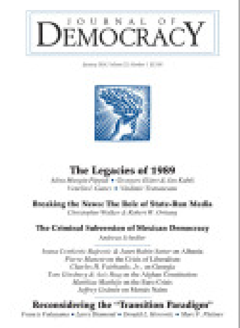

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# TECHNOCRATIC POPULISM IN ECUADOR

*Carlos de la Torre*

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When Rafael Correa won his third presidential election with a commanding 57 percent of the vote on 17 February 2013, Ecuador went from being a country that seemingly could not keep a chief executive in office—there had been no fewer than seven of them during the decade before Correa's first win in 2006—to being one with a stable president. Correa speaks of himself as leading a "citizens' revolution" that aims to achieve "a radical and rapid change in the existing structures of Ecuadorean society, in order to change the bourgeois state into a truly popular one."[1] He is part of a trend that Kurt Weyland describes elsewhere in these pages as a move toward "soft authoritarianism that is taking hold in parts of Latin America." Like the late Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Correa positions himself as a left-of-center politician with a special concern for the poor and marginalized, though his is a populism with a curiously elitist and technocratic bent.

Correa claims to reject the concept of parties, but his "movement," the Proud and Sovereign Fatherland Alliance (Alianza PAIS or AP), won 52 percent of the overall vote in the National Assembly balloting that was held the same day. Thanks to creative electoral-system engineering, that slightly better than 50 percent showing was enough to give AP an overwhelming 100 of the Assembly's 131 seats. Ecuador's political future now rests firmly in the hands of Correa and his lieutenants, even as the regime of Correa's most important preceptor in authoritarian leftist populism, Hugo Chávez, is facing grave un-


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certainties and difficulties following Chávez's death of cancer on 5 March 2013.

As I understand the term, "populism"—which may appear in leftist or rightist forms—is an approach to politics that depicts it as a struggle between "the people" and some malign elite or set of elites. Under populism, "the people" is imagined as a homogenous body sharing interests and an identity that are embodied in a leader whose mission is to save the nation. Populism includes previously excluded groups, while fostering majoritarian understandings of democracy that do not always respect the rights of the opposition or the institutional fabric of democracy. Classic Latin American populism, whose heyday ran from the 1940s to the 1970s, was inclusionary and antiliberal at the same time. Populists fought against vote fraud and expanded the franchise. Their rhetoric gave symbolic dignity to the poor, and their socioeconomic policies included the marginalized. Yet populists also selectively disregarded the norms and procedures of liberal democracy, intimidated the opposition, attacked the privately owned media, and coopted civil society organizations or built new ones from the top down.

When a new generation of populist outsiders began coming to power in the 1990s, typically amid crises that undermined political parties and democratic institutions, the relationships between populism and liberal democracy became even more troubled. As Correa would a short time later, Chávez and Peru's Alberto Fujimori denounced parties, shut down or replaced national legislatures, packed institutions of control with supporters, attacked private media outlets, and harassed civil society groups with ties to traditional parties. Correa has modeled himself most closely upon his fellow left-wing populist Chávez. Both men convened constituent assemblies, wrote new constitutions, and used elections to push aside traditional elites and build new hegemonic blocs. Each left the act of voting intact and indeed relied on it for legitimacy, but once in office used the power and resources of the state to blatantly reshape the electoral playing field to his own advantage. As Weyland notes, each seized upon a crisis besetting political institutions in his country in order to begin moving toward a competitive authoritarian regime.

Although Correa shares with the late Venezuelan president an authoritarian bent that has led to the undermining of democracy's institutional fabric, Correa differs from Chávez in significant ways. Chávez created an array of participatory institutions, mobilized supporters, and selectively nationalized private property. Correa combines populist rhetoric with top-down technocratic policies. He uses extraordinary windfall oil rents and tax hikes to fund income redistribution, but does not directly nationalize private property. Elites in Ecuador have not mobilized against his "citizens' revolution," whose victims have been the private media, social movements, and traditional parties, including those on the left such as Pachakutik and the Maoist Popular

Democratic Movement (MPD). Because his opposition has been so weak, Correa has not needed to do much mass mobilizing for anything beyond campaign purposes.

Correa's 57 percent vote share on February 17 was five points better than he had done in his last reelection in 2009. He swept all major cities, and won overwhelming support from the poor as well as a sizeable share of Ecuador's middle-class voters. The runner-up was Guillermo Lasso, a banker and political outsider who leads a renovated right unlinked to traditional parties and who calls for carrying on Correa's key redistributive social policies while defending liberal freedoms. Lasso won 23 percent, spread fairly evenly across Ecuador's two-dozen provinces. A young rightist technocrat, Mauricio Rodas, won another 4 percent. A trio of populist parties associated with, respectively, former presidents Abdalá Bucaram and Lucio Gutiérrez and multimillionaire perennial presidential candidate Álvaro Noboa won a combined total of close to 12 percent, putting the combined right-of-center vote at about 39 percent. On the traditional left, a coalition of the MPD and Pachakutik (which is the political arm of CONAIE, Ecuador's largest organization of indigenous people) managed only an abysmal showing of slightly more than 3 percent for its standard-bearer, Alberto Acosta.

The majority of Ecuadorians endorsed Correa's redistributive and authoritarian project, billed as a reversal of neoliberalism through higher social spending and policies targeted at poverty reduction. The key to it all has been the global boom in commodities, especially oil, which has allowed Correa to hire more bureaucrats and launch ambitious infrastructure projects. With people from all classes having more money to spend and with living standards going up, strong support for the incumbent is hardly a surprise. Attacks on private media or the persecution of peasant, indigenous, and other left-wing activists seem of less importance to voters. Most Ecuadorians appear willing to trade their freedoms for economic prosperity.

## Chronicle of a Triumph Foretold

The 2013 elections unfolded like a chronicle of a triumph foretold. With approval ratings consistently above 50 percent and his foes in disarray, Correa seemed unbeatable. His victory was a sad confirmation that Ecuador is moving down an increasingly authoritarian path. All branches of government are under his control, so there will be no institutional mechanisms for holding him accountable. His government can do what it wants to cudgel the media, push forward with open-pit mining, and silence critical social movements.

When Correa first ran for the presidency in 2006, he was the ultimate outsider—a college economics professor who had never even

belonged to a party. Ecuador was coping not only with its burden of presidential instability but also with the aftermath of a major economic crisis that in 1999 and 2000 had collapsed the banking system and triggered the exodus of thousands of citizens to Europe and the United States. Correa had no background in the politics of democratic bargaining, and ran on a populist platform that called for the closure of Congress followed by elections for a constituent assembly that would write a new basic law. The underlying goal was to break the *partidocracia* or system of domination by political parties.

***Correa casts himself not as the modest president of a small country, but as a man on a huge historical mission that forms part of a continental-scale political project.***

Correa broke Ecuador's fragile and discredited political institutions to bits. He shut down Congress and actively promoted the destruction of traditional parties. He forged personal and unmediated links with his electors. Alianza PAIS combines a self-presentation as a citizens' movement (with Correa just another citizen) with an elevation of the president as the embodiment of his "citizens' revolution."

The drafting of Ecuador's twentieth constitution was an experiment in deliberative democracy that did not mix easily with Correa's style of charismatic leadership. He became impatient with assembly debates that threatened to cost his side votes in the ratifying referendum. Charging assembly delegates from his own movement with delusional "left-wing infantilism," he blocked AP members from backing legalized abortion, gay rights, and official status for the indigenous Kichwa language. The 2008 Constitution, approved by 64 percent in a referendum, mixes hyperpresidentialism with an expanded list of rights, including "rights of nature."

As did Chávez, Correa uses the media to bond directly with his constituents. Every Saturday he appears live for about three hours on nationwide radio and television in a program called *Enlace Ciudadano* (Citizen Connection). Broadcasting from different places around the country, some of which no head of state has ever before visited, he sits on a high platform and gives PowerPoint presentations. Sometimes he asks his live audience yes-or-no questions, but actual dialogue is rare. Occasionally he might invite an official to explain a particular policy, but the gist of the show is that Correa is "large and in charge," knowing and expounding upon all topics. He aims to seem folksy as well, using colloquialisms and telling personal stories about his humble background (his University of Illinois economics doctorate was paid for by a study-abroad scholarship). Like Chávez, he jokes, sings, and leads people in chanting slogans against the opposition to chastise it

for its "lies" and "barbarities." *Enlace* displays the Correa regime in microcosm: The president-professor lectures a nation that is free to laud him but not to engage him in critical dialogue.

Correa casts himself not as the modest president of a small country (Ecuador has about fifteen-million people), but as a man on a huge historical mission that forms part of a continental-scale political project. His opponents, he says, include traditional politicians, bankers, the privately owned media, and those who lead corporatist social movements of teachers, students, indigenous peoples, and public employees. His penchant for Manichean rhetoric may stir his voters, but it suggests deeply antidemocratic tendencies. Political rivals are remade into irreconcilable enemies of the savior of the nation. The rhetoric of revolution paints politics as a clash of opposing historical projects. It forces people to take sides in conflicts of epic proportions, with space for democratic dialogue reduced accordingly.

Correa's project of social and economic transformation is based on substantive notions of democracy that identify it with policies meant to bring about social justice. Liberal-democratic institutions, with their focus on accountability, checks and balances, and the rights of minorities appear as impediments standing in the way of Correa's plan for historic transformation. The hollowing-out, circumvention, or disabling of those institutions is an intrinsic part of the building of a hyperpersonalist competitive-authoritarian regime.

The concentration of power in the presidency and the lack of mechanisms for control and accountability became obvious in the 2013 election campaign. Correa has been campaigning since his inauguration in early 2007; the opposition only had 42 days. According to Participación Ciudadana, a nongovernmental organization that monitored the election, Correa's exposure on television—all stations are required to carry his broadcasts—was more than double that of all his rivals put together. When bad press did appear, in the form of a story about Correa's running mate Jorge Glas having possibly committed academic plagiarism online, for instance, the president struck back hard.

In order to ensure an AP majority in the National Assembly, the Correa strongholds of Quito and Guayaquil (Ecuador's two largest cities) were given extra seats. The executive branch reintroduced the D'Hondt seat-allocation method, which is well known to favor large parties and coalitions. The National Electoral Council (CNE) stood by while Correa made campaign trips in army helicopters, but forced a left-wing ticket to withdraw a television advertisement poking fun at "the little king and his court" on the grounds that it was offensive to the president. Pro-Correa programming, meanwhile, aired unimpeded on state-run media, even broadcasting live campaign events as the government forbade private media outlets from endorsing candidates. Many newspapers simply gave up covering the campaign's closing rallies.

Left-wing candidate Alberto Acosta compared running against Correa to playing a soccer match on a tilted field with a referee in the pay of the other team. He was not exaggerating: The CNE's head is a close Correa ally, and all institutions of oversight, accountability, and control are in the administration's hands. A 2011 referendum had given Correa the power to restructure the judicial system, and he staffed the courts with his loyal followers.

Correa took a leave of absence from the presidency in order to spend all his time campaigning. He sought above all to lend his charisma to the AP's Assembly candidates. His stump speech contrasted a past ruled by bankers and corrupt politicians with the present and future of a redistributive citizens' revolution. He depicted social-movement activists as "thugs" and "rock throwers" bent on paralyzing the country with strikes and road blockades. He quoted figures from the Economic Commission for Latin America to illustrate his accomplishments in reducing poverty and promoting economic growth.

## Technocracy and Redistribution

Reaping the windfall rents provided by an oil bonanza in a country where petroleum exports account for about 35 percent of government income, Ecuador under Rafael Correa is living through a modernizing revolution from above. The objective of Correa's regime is to construct a postadjustment variety of capitalism that the president and his supporters call "postneoliberalism." The state, in their view, must be in charge of reducing inequalities and controlling natural resources. Correa's regime envisions building a new and hypermodern Ecuador that, according to the National Development Plan (PND), will be exporting biotechnology and nanotechnology by the year 2030.

The idea is to build a state that represents the general interest of society as a whole. One of Correa's premises is that *all* groups in civil society, regardless of ideology or class composition, stand for particular concerns while his government occupies a higher plane above the narrow, jostling agendas of special interests and corporatist groups. In organization-chart terms, the duty to build the universal state rests on the National Secretariat for Planning and Development (SENPLADES). This institution is in charge of public planning, reforming the state apparatus, public investment, training public servants, and writing the PND.

Unlike neoliberal technocrats who had links with private financial institutions and international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the technocrats of SENPLADES come from academia and NGOs. Where their neoliberal forebears placed their trust in econometric models, Correa's experts are interdisciplinary and eclectic—the papers that they produce are replete with citations from postcolonial theorists, radical democrats, unorthodox economists, and political ecol-

ogists. Like technocrats generally, however, they appeal to their role as experts and see themselves as transcending particularistic criteria in order to act in society's best interest.

Technocrats sometimes embrace moral and redemptive missions such as rebuilding their nations in order to bring progress, development, or modernity. Sergio de Castro, the dean of Chile's "Chicago Boys" who served as his country's economy and finance minister from 1975 to 1982 under General Augusto Pinochet, argued that he not only had to reverse three years of failed socialist policies adopted under the violently overthrown president Salvador Allende, but also had to undo a solid half-century of economic-policy errors. Similarly, Ecuador's postneoliberal technocrats believe that they have a mission. Their goal is to build what in Kichwa is called the *sumak kawsay*, which literally means "the life well lived" and may be metaphysically interpreted as "respecting the harmony between community and cosmos."[2] This grandiose objective, they claim, comes from indigenous cosmology, and aims to build "the good life," understood as non-Western relationships between society, nature, and development.

Under Correa, populism has turned into elitism. Self-described post-neoliberal experts claim to know how to build a just and rational society, without needing citizen input. They conceive of society as an amorphous mass that should be reorganized according to their expert knowledge. Technocratic reason—with its claims to be true and scientific—replaces the give-and-take of democratic debate over proposals. Whatever the talk about plans and indigenous cosmology, in practice Correa's experts rely on old strategies such as natural-resource exploitation and import-substitution industrialization. In 2013, Correa campaigned on the promise to develop responsible mining. After learning of his reelection, he repeated his commitment to the "careful" exploitation of natural resources to relieve poverty. The state is promoting selective import-substitution industrialization as well as the construction of hydroelectric plants and a new oil refinery being built with Chinese capital. The engine of economic growth is public investment, "making Correa's state-centric model highly dependent, at least in the short and medium term, on revenues from Ecuador's current and prospective extractive industries (oil and new mining ventures)."[3]

Correa acted on his promise to reverse neoliberalism by boosting social spending from 5 percent of GDP in 2006 to 9.85 percent in 2011. The minimum wage went from US$170 to $240 a month. The government continues to subsidize gasoline, domestically consumed natural gas, and electricity. The Human Development Bonus—a cash-transfer program for those in the lower 40 percent of income distribution who are mothers of children under 16, above the age of 65, or disabled—has improved the income, health, and education of the poorest. From 2006 to the beginning of 2012, the number of those receiving a modest month-

ly allowance through this program doubled to almost two million. The share of Ecuador's populace living below the poverty line had begun dropping before Correa took power, going from 49 percent in 2003 to 37 percent just three years later on the eve of his first election. After Correa became president, it declined still further, albeit at a less dramatic rate, reaching 29 percent in 2011. The national Gini coefficient (a 100-point measure of income inequality in which a higher number signals sharper disparities) went from 50.4 in 2006 to 47.0 in 2011.[4]

As impressive as these figures are, it must be noted that there are no studies of the *quality* of social spending under Correa. The amount assigned to social programs does not always "buy" a commensurate improvement in public services, and the media have reported cases of mismanagement and corruption. Moreover, ethnographic studies show that these social programs have the effect of making beneficiaries feel personally obliged to Correa. For example, an indigenous woman from Tixán in Chimborazo Province told anthropologist Luis Tuaza, "Today I am grateful to God and to President Correa. I have the cash transfer to buy food, pay for electricity, and can buy a little something for my kids." Another woman said, "Thanks to the president, I get 35 dollars." One respondent summarized the feelings of reciprocity that beneficiaries feel toward Correa: "The government takes care of us, we have to be grateful."[5]

The main legacy of Correa's administration might be his commitment to social policies on behalf of the poor. In a bow to this, opposition presidential candidate Guillermo Lasso called his own movement Creating Opportunities (CREO). He vowed to continue with Correa's targeted antipoverty social policies, even promising to raise the Human Development Bonus from $35 to $50 per month (Correa later did this himself via a law taxing bank profits).

## Taming Social Movements

Correa's goal of rationalizing and modernizing the state to eliminate administrative irrationalities and corporatist privileges has provoked conflicts with most organized civil society groups. To the administration, organizations of teachers, students, public employees, and indigenous people do not count as "real" social movements. Instead, they appear in official rhetoric as "special interests" that stand in the way of vital state-building efforts. The government has clashed with students and teachers over changes to the high-school and university curricula, and has tried to do away with the MPD-controlled teachers' union. Similar efforts have targeted public-sector unionization more broadly. With scant evidence, authorities accused militants from an MPD-affiliated left-wing student group of terrorism, securing jail terms for ten of them.

The government's conflicts with CONAIE (the name stands for the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) are partly rooted in strong disagreements over mineral extraction. Correa sees mining—Ecuador is now a significant gold exporter—as a key to the future and proposes to use natural resources to alleviate poverty. "We cannot be beggars sitting on a sack of gold," he has said. The indigenous movement—CONAIE is its largest group—and environmentalists counter that the new constitution's overarching goal of *sumak kawsay* justifies their opposition to mineral extraction and their push to establish alternative relationships between humans, nature, and development.

Correa's government also collided with indigenous movements over the question of autonomy. From 1988 to 2009, indigenous organizations managed a parallel bilingual (Spanish and Kichwa) system of schooling outside the Education Ministry. This was the only case in Latin America in which indigenous organizations were free to staff educational bureaucracies, hire teachers, and shape curricula even as the central state retained budgetary control. Equating such autonomy with privatization and corporatism and by extension with neoliberalism, the Correa administration took bilingual education away from indigenous organizations and gave it to the Education Ministry. Indigenous teachers opposed this move; tragically, one was killed in a confrontation with police in the southeastern province of Morona-Santiago.

As Correa admitted in a 2012 interview with the *New Left Review*, his government's strategy has been to bypass CONAIE's leaders and establish direct ties to its middle ranks and broad membership.[6] The government also formed or revived parallel indigenous organizations such as the Federation of Ecuadorian Indians (FEI), rallying as well the leaders of smaller indigenous groups that had long nursed rivalries with CONAIE. Correa even brought the Afro-Ecuadorian movement into his camp. He thinks of indigenous and other poor Ecuadorians not as autonomous actors but rather as beneficiaries of state redistribution. Indigenous groups that dare to voice their own views about development or democracy are stigmatized as "infantile" leftists probably being manipulated by foreign NGOs. The bullying, moreover, goes far beyond expressions of presidential displeasure: More than two-hundred indigenous and peasant leaders currently face terrorism charges for their activities in opposition to open-pit mining.

In the 1990s, CONAIE had taken part in huge protests that contributed to the overthrow of two presidents and led the resistance to neoliberalism. By the time Correa came to power, however, the indigenous movement's capacity for sustained collective action had shrunk, and its political party Pachakutik seemed to many like just another traditional political party. In 2013, Pachakutik and the MPD, the main victims of Correa's autocratic policies, banded together behind Acosta. Yet their showing was so dismal that it appears obvious they will have to look

beyond leftist precincts and begin seeking allies in the center too. Their losses at the polls do not mean that indigenous and other social movements must or will passively accept Correa's policies. His enthusiasm for open-pit mining is sure to lead to more confrontations, especially in the fragile rainforest region of southern Ecuador.

## Colonizing the Public Sphere

Correa's administration is warring against private media. Fundamedios, an NGO that monitors press freedom, reports 597 acts of "aggression" by the government against the press since 2008. The most notorious cases made world headlines when an editor and three board members of *El Universo,* Ecuador's largest privately owned newspaper, were convicted of defamation and sentenced to three-year terms for publishing an editorial entitled, "No to Lies." The paper was also fined $40 million. In early 2012, President Correa pardoned Emilio Palacio, the editorial's author, and the owners of the newspaper. Palacio remains in exile in the United States. Correa also sued for libel investigative journalists Juan Carlos Calderón and Christian Zurita for uncovering detailed allegations that his brother Fabricio Correa took advantage of official favoritism to obtain state contracts worth about $150 million. President Correa demanded $2 million in damages for "moral harm." He pardoned the reporters after they were promptly found guilty, but as in the Palacio case, an example had been made and journalists across Ecuador put on notice about what might happen to them should they incur the president's wrath.

Less known abroad are the cases of television news anchors and talk-show hosts Carlos Vera and Jorge Ortiz, each of whom lost his job due to pressure from the Correa administration. Correa called Ortiz a "dwarf," a "big fake," a "swine," and a "professional defamer." Janet Hinostroza, who directed a news show based on investigative reporting, resigned after being threatened by anonymous callers when she discovered that Correa's cousin Pedro Delgado, the head of the Central Bank, approved an $800,000 loan to an Argentine entrepreneur who never paid it back.

According to President Correa, "the media have always been one of the de facto powers that have dominated Latin American countries."[7] He insists that the media are controlled by a few oligarchic families who, angry at the loss of old privileges, are campaigning to smear left-of-center regimes at the national and international levels. Journalists, charges Correa, merely reproduce what media owners tell them to. Claiming that "information is a public good," he argues that the state must regulate content and set limits on how a public service is administered by private providers, as if the press in a democracy is no different from the water company.

In order to counteract what he perceives as unfair attacks by the

private media, Correa uses a four-pronged strategy. The first prong is state-run media. His administration created a public television station, *Ecuador TV*, and the newspapers *El Ciudadano* and *PP El Verdadero,* the latter targeted at working-class audiences. Three television and four radio stations that belonged to the Isaías brothers were confiscated in order to collect their debts to the state. Using the same arguments, the government took possession of *Diario El Telégrafo*. The state is now in charge of a media conglomerate that includes Ecuador's two most-watched television stations as well as several radio stations and newspapers. In a country lacking a tradition of public media, and in the hands of an administration that identifies its own short-term interests with high purposes of state, these outlets serve Correa as propaganda tools.

The second prong is Correa's own extensive use of the media to "push back" hard against critical opinions and journalistic reports. As noted above, Correa uses mandatory national broadcasts to publicize his administration's accomplishments, to respond to media reports of corruption and abuse, and to attack the opposition. From 2007 to 2012, the administration aired 1,365 mandatory broadcasts that lasted for a total of almost twelve-thousand minutes. Typically, there is an entire segment of the weekly *Enlace* show during which Correa personally criticizes media reports and opinion pieces that question his policies. In 2009, he said that "the bourgeois press is the new opium of the people." He has called journalists *mafiosi,* "savage beasts," and "idiots who publish trash." In his belligerence, he has even torn to pieces copies of newspapers such as *El Universo* and *La Hora* on the air, and has displayed individual journalists' photographs so that the public can know what these "enemies of the homeland" look like.

State regulation of private media is the third prong. At the time of this writing in May 2013, the National Assembly is still considering legislation that would create a board for monitoring and regulating media content. This communications law, which will restrict freedom of the press, is expected to pass. According to the administration, such a regulatory mechanism is needed in order to assure that private media outlets impart information objectively. Correa's government does not see the danger of censorship and state regulation of the media. On the contrary, any attempt at watchdog journalism is viewed with suspicion, and the president is not the only state official who has used the libel laws to intimidate and silence critical journalists.

Finally, there is economic strangulation. Unlike Argentina, Brazil, or Mexico, Ecuador has no private media monopolies. Regionally based families own media outlets. Owners of newspapers and radios stations that for the most part have relatively small profit margins are quite vulnerable to official pressures. The Constitution of 2008 forbids owners of banks to own media outlets. The 2011 referendum prohibited media owners from owning stocks in other types of enterprises. The govern-

ment uses its tax-collecting agency to monitor the private media, and labor inspectors have been sent to various media outlets. *Revista Vanguardia*, for instance, was temporarily closed for not complying with labor laws. The state raised the price of paper, and cut off critical newspapers and radio stations from official advertising. These tactics are suffocating the private media economically. Many outlets will have to go easy on the administration—both editorially and investigatively—or risk being forced out of business.

Correa's war on the media has led to an impoverishment of political debate. The administration refuses to allow its functionaries to give interviews or appear on talk shows if the publication or station is privately owned, while state outlets carry no critical coverage and ask no difficult questions.

## A Giant with Feet of Clay?

Correa wants to leave behind a major historical legacy. In speeches, he often claims to be the leader of the second and definitive independence of Ecuador. Even though he complains about the personal sacrifices that he must endure as president, he leaves the door open to the idea of changing the constitution so that he can run again. Will he be tempted to stay in power until his revolutionary job is done, or to stop the right or the "infantile left" from reversing his accomplishments? In any case, will the extreme personalization of his regime and his view of himself as a leader with a calling tempt him to see power as his personal possession rather than as a temporary and limited trust from the voters? Like other populists such as Fujimori or Chávez, he might feel that his mission has not yet been fulfilled. Given his lack of faith in the formalities of "bourgeois" democracy with its inconvenient turnovers of power, he might choose to seek another reelection.

Correa's powerful and efficient electoral machinery might indicate that he or any successor he chooses can keep winning elections. Yet his popularity flows from an economic boom whose like Ecuador has not seen since the 1970s, when oil money first allowed the country to become a predominantly urban society. Correa understands all this, of course—his interest in mining has much to do with his appreciation of Ecuador's dependence on diminishing oil reserves. But if history is any guide, the only certainty is that commodity booms eventually go bust.

Correa has not routinized his charisma into a political party where new leaders can be trained. So far, his citizens' revolution is wholly centered on his persona. But as Chávez's death at the age of 58 recently underlined, succession in such personalized regimes is always an issue. Unlike Evo Morales, his approximate contemporary in Bolivia, Correa lacks deep roots in civil society and social movements. Morales rose as the leader of a heavily indigenous social movement, while Correa has

actively sought to demobilize his country's indigenous population and to tame civil society. Unlike Hugo Chávez, Correa has not created participatory institutions at the local level. There is no Ecuadorian equivalent of Venezuela's Communal Councils or other *chavista* participatory vehicles. On the contrary, Correa favors rule by experts with civil society demobilized. As a result, loyalty to his "citizens' revolution" might prove ephemeral. Some populist movements outlasted the lives of their leaders—Argentinian Peronism was grounded in organized labor while Peruvian *aprismo* rested on the strength of a political party. "Correísmo," by contrast, seems like a throwback to Ecuador's President José María Velasco Ibarra (1893–1979), who was elected five times between 1934 and 1968, but never built a party or a civil society organization. As a result, he was able to complete his constitutionally prescribed time in office only once, and his movement disintegrated upon his death.

Loyalties to Correa so far seem to be feeble. On 30 September 2010, when the president nearly lost his life while trying personally to resolve a police strike, only a handful of bureaucrats and activists took to the streets of Quito to rescue their leader from the hands of the striking police. His power seems to rest more on his redistributive apparatus than on strong organizations in civil society.

Correa has not needed to organize his followers beyond elections because he has not faced strong opposition. The traditional parties rapidly fell apart, and Correa used the crises of the indigenous movement to isolate CONAIE's leadership from its rank-and-file. With the economy booming and most Ecuadorians benefiting, Correa critics with disparate ideologies have not been willing or able to form a united electoral front.

Correa's project of "substantive democratization" based on notions of social justice has never valued or respected liberal freedoms and procedures, and thus has led to the building of an authoritarian regime. This regime instrumentally used laws to close Congress illegally and to clothe the Constituent Assembly with legislative powers. The resulting concentration of power allowed Correa to swiftly restructure institutions and pack the organs of control with his loyalists. There has indeed been rapid and bold change in Ecuador, just as Correa promised, but its price has been the concomitant rise of competitive authoritarianism. Power is focused in the executive, other branches of government enjoy little independence, and mechanisms of institutional accountability are nowhere to be found. Correa's regime is at war with the private media and is taking possession of the entire public sphere. Adversaries, especially from the left, have been transformed into "enemies of the revolution." The state is coopting social movements and taming civil society. Citizens are being turned into passive and grateful recipients of the leader's benevolent and technocratically engineered redistributive policies.

Under Correa, democracy has been reduced to voting in elections that are held on an uneven playing field and without independent oversight.

His regime views democracy as a matter of technocratic policies aimed at reducing poverty. In the long run, as Alberto Acosta points out, Correa's inclination to favor aggressive natural-resource extraction could well lead to resource depletion and a new rise in poverty. In the short run, however, oil and mining will fund handouts for the poor and rising consumption for the middle class, with Correa the political beneficiary.

It could be that as long as the commodities boom lasts, no feasible opposition coalition is going to be enough to stop Correa and his authoritarian project. At any rate, it will surely be difficult for either the left or for populist strongmen such as Bucaram and Noboa to rally behind Guillermo Lasso, a banker and a right-of-center Catholic who belongs to Opus Dei. But the ballot box is what has given Correa his legitimacy and allowed him to consolidate his hegemony; it must therefore be the route that the fragmented opposition uses to resist his authoritarian schemes. When an atmosphere of democratic dialogue has given way to a toxic climate of struggle between enemies, however, the temptation to indulge in antidemocratic politics and authoritarian fantasizing can begin to loom dangerously before the eyes of frustrated oppositionists.

## NOTES

1. "Rafael Correa Interview: Ecuador's Path," *New Left Review* 77 (September–October 2012): 90.

2. SENPLADES, *Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir, 2009–2013: Construyendo un Estado Plurinacional e Intercultural* (Quito: SENPLADES, 2009), 18.

3. Catherine Conaghan, "Ecuador: Rafael Correa and the Citizen's Revolution," in Steven Levitsky and Kenneth Roberts, eds., *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 277.

4. Rebecca Ray and Sara Kozameh, "Ecuador's Economy Since 2007," Center for Economic and Policy Research, Washington, D.C., May 2012.

5. Luis Alberto Tuaza, "La relación del gobierno de Rafael Correa y las bases indígenas: Políticas públicas en el medio rural," *Ecuador Debate* 83 (August 2011): 145.

6. "Rafael Correa Interview," postcript.

7. "Rafael Correa Interview," 100, emphasis in original.