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New Paths Forward

Maximilian Viatori

Iowa State University

Over the past two decades, Ecuador's Indigenous organizations have emerged as some of the most powerful social movements in the world and become examples of how historically marginalized peoples can alter their country's political course. Ecuador's Indigenous activists have employed a dual political strategy in their struggle for social justice: exerting pressure on the government through mass mobilizations that have often brought the country to a standstill, and working within the state to elaborate new proposals aimed at making political participation more inclusive. In *¡Pachakutik!*, Becker provides an in-depth examination of the

dynamic between these two facets of Indigenous politics at different points since 1990. Becker shows that the tension between the two strategies exacerbated divisions within the movement (divisions that Ecuador's presidents have been all too happy to exploit) and threatened to pull it apart at times. However, he argues that social protest and electoral politics have provided Indigenous activists with multiple tools for advancing their demands and have enabled them to emphasize one path when the other was momentarily blocked. The result is a book that provides a thought provoking exploration of the challenges of a dual approach to Indigenous electoral politics and social movement organizing.

Becker is a historian and relies primarily on existing reports, media coverage, published interviews with activists and politicians, and academic literature. He uses this information to build a coherent narrative of national-level Indigenous organizing and politics in Ecuador during the past two decades. The field of Ecuadorian studies has long needed a detailed history of recent national Indigenous politics and *¡Pachakutik!* provides scholars working on local movements or specific aspects of Ecuadorian Indigenous politics a resource for orienting their work to broader national trends and discourses. The many detailed references are also a boon for scholars new to Ecuadorian studies or those interested in comparative work, as Becker provides extensive citations of existing literature on Ecuador in Spanish and English. *¡Pachakutik!* is written in an engaging style and is free of academic jargon, making it a good choice for for readers who are new to the study of Indigenous politics in Latin America.

Becker begins with a recent history of Indigenous politics in Ecuador and the emergence of CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) in the 1980s and 1990s. The confederation sought to become the first "truly national" (8) Indigenous organization and built its political project around the notion of plurinationalism, which in CONAIE's words meant the "recognition of a multicultural society that recognized, respected, and promoted unity, equality, and solidarity among different peoples and nationalities despite their historic, political, and cultural differences" (14-15). Becker argues that CONAIE's goal of

becoming “truly national” was not easy to consolidate given existing cultural, economic and political differences among Indigenous nationalities and communities (9). For example, while Andean activists were most concerned with agrarian and economic reform, Amazonian activists emphasized environmental issues and the defense of historical territories. Moreover, as Becker notes, CONAIE was not the only “national” Indigenous organization, but was joined by FENOCIN (National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous, and Negro Organizations), a member of Vía Campesina and supporter of intercultural democracy, and FEINE (Council of Evangelical Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of Ecuador), an evangelical organization that tended to support the government and oppose ideas of plurinational or multicultural citizenship. Although these competing perspectives have sometimes led to bitter disputes among activists, Becker argues that at times they have coalesced to create a “multivocal” and “dynamic” movement (18).

1990 marked a watershed year for Indigenous activism in Ecuador and signaled the ascendance of CONAIE in national politics. During June of that year CONAIE led a nation-wide *levantamiento* that paralyzed Ecuador, calling for a broad range of political demands (from bilingual education to agrarian reform) aimed at giving Indigenous peoples greater autonomy. As Becker demonstrates, the 1990 protest kicked off a decade of “greatly intensified activism during which Indigenous demands gained a new visibility and urgency” (1). The *levantamiento* was so momentous that Indigenous activists began to refer to it as a *pachakutik*—a Kichwa word signifying a “change, rebirth, and transformation, both in the sense of a return in time and the coming of a new era” (1-2). Although highly symbolic and significant in making Indigenous demands known on a national level, Becker notes that these protests did not make much headway in “concretely altering government politics” (37). In order to do so, some Indigenous activists argued that they needed to become involved in electoral politics. This led Amazonian Activists to create the Pachakutik Movement for Plurinational Unity in 1995 (to the chagrin of highland activists who had publicly opposed involvement in electoral politics). Pachakutik, as it is commonly referred to in Ecuador, emerged as an

alternative to Indigenous activists allying with traditional leftist political parties that often viewed their Indigenous colleagues as “junior partners” (43).

Becker points out that Pachakutik was not envisioned as an “Indigenous” political party, but a cross-ethnic platform for advancing radical change in Ecuador. From early on Pachakutik experienced “moderate success” especially in congressional and municipal races, marking not only the growing importance of Indigenous peoples in national politics, but also the ability of Indigenous politicians to cultivate mestizo support “successfully” (52). In the 1998 constituent assembly that re-wrote Ecuador’s constitution, incorporating new Indigenous rights, Pachakutik was the “third largest political force in the assembly” (58). At the close of the millennium, Pachakutik’s influence appeared to be growing at the same time that Ecuador’s Indigenous confederations took on an increasingly powerful role in national mobilizations.

In January 2000 CONAIE participated in the peaceful ouster of president Jamil Mahuad amidst an economic collapse. For several hours Ecuador was ruled by a triumvirate comprised of Lucio Gutiérrez (an army colonel), Antonio Vargas (then-president of CONAIE), and Carlos Solórzano (former president of Ecuador’s Supreme Court) before power was eventually turned over to Mahuad’s vice president, Gustavo Noboa. Noboa’s unwillingness to dialogue with CONAIE led to a follow-up protest in 2001 in which CONAIE, FEINE, and FENOCIN united. It resulted in a promise by Noboa to work with Indigenous leaders—a promise on which he gradually reneged. Becker argues that ultimately the coup represented an opportunity for elites to regain the upper hand and maintain their grasp on power. However, he also notes that the 2000 coup and the 2001 protest ended a decade in which Indigenous peoples had “created new forms of leadership, introduced new discourses, placed themselves on the center stage of popular movements, inserted their demands in the public sphere in such a way that they could not be ignored, and transformed the political landscape of the country” (74). As Becker points out, these are no small feats for a movement that was little more than a decade old.

While CONAIE was engaged in popular protests, Pachakutik continued to score electoral wins and discussed ways to broaden its political base. However, despite its early electoral successes, the creation of Pachakutik was far from an unequivocal triumph for Ecuador's Indigenous movements. According to Becker (53), engaging in electoral politics exacerbated divisions within the movement and also between indigenous leaders and their base. This was perhaps most apparent (and damaging) in CONAIE's and Pachakutik's alliance with Lucio Gutiérrez's administration. In the 2002 elections, Indigenous activists were split on whether to run a candidate of their own for president. Ultimately, Pachakutik chose not to run a candidate and instead (along with FENOCIN) supported Gutiérrez on a common platform of poverty alleviation, anti-neoliberalism, and anti-corruption. Upon taking office, Gutiérrez appointed four Indigenous politicians to high-level cabinet posts. However, Gutiérrez quickly moved to the right, supporting neoliberal economic policies. By August 2003, CONAIE and Pachakutik withdrew their support for Gutiérrez's government. However, the Amazonian branch of CONAIE, CONFENIAE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon) chose to continue its support for the government (in general Amazonian activists have been more willing to engage in governmental politics and this was especially the case with Gutiérrez who is from the Amazonian province of Napo). Gutiérrez used these divisions to his advantage, funneling clientelistic support to the Amazon and to FEINE, which continued to ally with him, as well as giving the now-discredited Antonio Vargas (who was no longer affiliated with CONAIE) a post as minister of social welfare. CONAIE was "so crippled" that it was unable to draw support for mobilizations against Gutiérrez in 2004 and when the president was finally ousted by street protests the following year, the confederation played only a minor role (92).

For Becker, the preceding decade and a half of Indigenous activism demonstrated that Ecuador's "Indigenous movements were strong enough to bring governments down, but not united enough to rule on their own" (96). While CONAIE had repeatedly pushed for reforms that would transform Ecuador's enduring inequalities, Becker (96) argues that the

realization of these reforms continued to be hampered by the power of “traditional clientelistic political parties” that were dead-set on opposing anything that would undermine their political power, as well as by internal divisions within Indigenous movements. Nonetheless, Becker suggests that the “Indigenous movements still appeared to be best positioned to stop the savageness of neoliberalism, defend national sovereignty, and implement a true democracy.” As Becker demonstrates, this has been clearly the case during the recent administrations of Rafael Correa.

Trained as an economist, Correa did not have links to existing political parties or social movements. As Becker points out, Correa was slow to “support social movements and their demands” and when he did it was in an “opportunistic fashion”, co-opting specific issues or “approaching individual leaders” to broker a deal (104-5). This made many Indigenous leaders suspicious of him and led to debates about how CONAIE should participate in the 2006 elections. In the end, Pachakutik chose to run long-time activist Luis Macas, who had been president of CONAIE twice and was minister of agriculture in the Gutiérrez administration. As Becker notes, this decision led to greater divisions in the movement; much of the Amazon chose to support Correa. For many, the decision to run Macas signaled a turn to the former and resulted in Pachakutik’s alienation of “its mestizo supporters” (107). Macas came in last in the presidential race with about one percent of the vote.

After winning the presidency in November 2006, Correa aggressively pursued political reforms that would consolidate greater power in the executive office. Becker argues that Correa has “demobilized the left” in Ecuador through measures such as denying social movements seats at the 2008 Constituent Assembly, recentralizing administration of Indigenous bilingual education, withholding funding to the ministry responsible for Indigenous development (CODENPE), and publicly lambasting social movement leaders who questioned his policies (114). For example, Becker notes that, “unlike Gutiérrez, representatives of Indigenous movements were largely excluded from Correa’s government” (115). Instead, Correa has repeatedly referred to Indigenous activists as “infiltrators and extremists” when they questioned his policies (115). In the

years following his 2009 re-election, Correa has clashed repeatedly with Indigenous activists over resource extraction and water privatization—the subject of the penultimate chapter of *¡Pachakutik!* Becker notes that Correa's clashes with Indigenous and environmental activists stem from his "resource-nationalist position that favors...national control of natural resources...[and] tends to be willing to sacrifice local or Indigenous concerns if doing so were to benefit the country as a whole" (179). Correa has worked to neutralized Indigenous movements by employing increasingly repressive tactics against Indigenous activists, such as employing police violence during Indigenous protests and charging Indigenous leaders with terrorism, sabotage, and libel.

The final four chapters of *Pachakutik* represent the book's most significant contribution to the study of Ecuadorian Indigenous politics, as they provide the most detailed analysis thus far (at least that I know of) of the effects of Correa's administrations on Indigenous movements. Becker's analysis of Correa's government provides an important contrast to the image that he and his supporters have projected domestically and internationally as a radical proponent of twenty first century socialism along with Bolivia's Evo Morales and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. This evaluation of Correa rests on his fiery populist, anti-imperialist rhetoric. However, Becker argues that a closer look at his policies reveals that Correa is more conservative (socially, politically and economically) than his rhetoric implies and notes that his strongest base of support is among "white, urban, middle-class" Ecuadorians, not leftist social movements (119).

While Indigenous organizing has become more difficult and politically risky under Correa, Becker shows that the president's actions have facilitated the "convergence of the Indigenous movement" (187). As evidence of this, Becker notes that FEINE and FENOCIN joined CONAIE in protests in May 2010 against water privatization legislation. Protests in March 2012 (occurring after the book's publication), which echoed the 1990 levantamiento in scope, would appear to support Becker's assertion and seem to indicate CONAIE's resurgence. Recent events call into question the death or decline of Ecuador's Indigenous movements and

underscore a strength in Becker's approach. Throughout the book he provides the reader with the challenges faced by Indigenous activists and politicians at different moments, the debates that ensued within the movement about what strategies to pursue and why, and how Indigenous militants looked for new paths forward in the face of setbacks. Becker reminds us that activists tend not to see sharp distinctions between political parties and social activism, instead moving from one to the other as the situation dictates (208). This is an important reminder that adaptability and the willingness to experiment are often the most significant determinants of a movement's longevity.