

**BARRICADES AND BALLOTS: ECUADOR'S INDIANS  
AND THE PACHAKUTIK POLITICAL MOVEMENT**

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*Abstract: The national-level indigenous confederation, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), along with its regional and provincial constituent organizations, has advanced the interests and constitutionally recognized rights of indigenous peoples in Ecuador via mass mobilizations and direct negotiations with the government. For a number of years the leadership of CONAIE rejected direct participation in elections and even refused to endorse parties or candidates. This was reversed in late 1995 with the formation of a political movement called Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik-Nuevo País. The purpose of this article is to analyze the electoral performance of this movement, especially in 1996 and 1998, in the context of the larger political environment and the various twists and turns of the indigenous movement between 1996 and 2000. The authors conclude with a brief discussion of the relative merits of barricades and ballots in advancing the cause of Ecuador's popular classes, both indigenous and non-indigenous.*

**INTRODUCTION**

On January 21, 2000, a surprising and historically significant event took place in Quito, Ecuador. A few thousand indigenous protestors, aided by union and leftist militants and sympathetic elements of the military, took control of the Congress building, the Supreme Court building and finally the Presidential palace. Some hours after the elected president Jamil Mahuad had fled the palace, a triumvirate appeared before supporters and the press to announce a National Salvation Front interim government. The three-man junta consisted of General Carlos Mendoza, Carlos

Solorzano (a former Supreme Court Justice) and Antonio Vargas, an *indígena* and president of the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE).

A number of public opinion polls both before and after January 21, 2000, indicated that 90 percent, or more, of the Ecuadorian population wanted Mahuad to leave office (Collins 2000). Nonetheless, the way in which his removal was accomplished and what happened later was both surprising and significant in a number of ways. The first surprise was the apparent coalition between indigenous activists and the military, which had been developing for some months in relation to opposition to the Mahuad government. Secondly, for both supporters and opponents, it was surprising to see an Indian sitting as part of a ruling coalition in Ecuador. The third surprise, and to many a great disappointment, was that the National Salvation junta lasted only a few hours before General Mendoza resigned and he and the Joint Command of the Armed Forces declared that they would follow the constitution and proceed with the installation of Vice-President Gustavo Noboa as president.

For observers of the Ecuadorian indigenous social movement, such as the present authors, the events of January 21, 2000 were significant in another way. After years of claiming that Ecuador's electoral politics and political parties were shams, CONAIE had reversed itself in 1995 by helping to create a political movement called Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik-Nuevo País (hereafter Pachakutik). At the time of the *golpe* or *rebelión*, six Pachakutik *diputados* served in Congress and a number of former CONAIE officials and indigenous activists served in bureaucratic posts in the Mahuad government. The demands of Vargas and other indigenous leaders for the resignation of Mahuad, his cabinet, and the dissolution of Congress reflected a high degree of frustration with the mainstream paths of gaining access to political power, including frustration with the Pachakutik *diputados*. In essence, the dramatic events of January 21, 2000 brought to the forefront an inherent tension between social movement militant tactics and more mainstream strategies to gain access to traditional political power via elected and appointed positions. But this tension existed from the outset and still does today.

There are two main goals in this article. First, we will describe and analyze the results of the Pachakutik movement's participation in elections, especially 1996 and 1998. Those two elections, unlike the 2000 elections, involved presidential and congressional contests and consequently are more comparable. The second goal is to look carefully at the articulation, or lack thereof, between Pachakutik and the broader indigenous movement in the context of the various crises and challenges present in Ecuador between 1996 and 2000.

## **PRELUDE TO THE BIRTH OF PACHAKUTIK**

There is little doubt that the historical context and contemporary reality of the Ecuadorian state have affected the timing, shape and direction of the indigenous movement. The concerted efforts of military-led governments in the 1960s and 1970s to promote the modernization of Ecuador and mold it into a more unified state spurred the development of numerous local and then provincial-level indigenous-based organizations, often as a defensive reaction to economic development plans but also to take advantage of the 1964 agricultural reform legislation that opened up the possibility of land redistribution (Zamosc 1994).

The return to electoral democracy in 1979 not only created opportunities but also presented challenges for the emerging indigenous movement. The multi-party system, dominated by two Quito-based parties, Democracia Popular (DP) and Izquierda Democrática (ID), and two Guayaquil-based parties, Partido Social Cristiano (PSC) and Partido Roldocista Ecuatoriano (PRE), presented an unstable, shifting political terrain that opened up spaces for emerging movements. The instability of the system as a whole, the frequent changes in coalitions that essentially represents a circulation of elites based in Quito and Guayaquil, made manifest the utility of a strong, independent, and unified national coalition of indigenous groups so that their voice could be heard regardless of the particular power brokers.

It is also necessary to consider the organizational features of the indigenous movement as crucial to understanding the movement's accomplishments, strategies and also the new direction indicated by the formation of the Pachakutik political movement. A relevant feature of most indigenous peoples and communities is strong communal orientation. This group or community orientation is often referred to by indigenous leaders (and many anthropologists) as an important contrast with "Western European culture." Part of this strong community identity emanates from the relatively high level of isolation experienced in most rural areas until recently. An important aspect of this orientation is the ability to mobilize the community in a swift, effective manner for the purpose of a *minga* (a community improvement project), saint's day festival or to block part of a highway with tree trunks and rocks.

This strong local organization is inward-oriented, however, and not necessarily conducive to a broader, outward-oriented social movement. The seeds of the modern Ecuadorian indigenous movement, according to Bebbington et al. (1992), were planted with the application of national laws that authorized the formation of community organizations that can receive funds from the state for various development projects. Bebbington et al. report that from 1974 to 1990 the number of registered indigenous communities, associations, cooperatives and *centros* increased from 1,530 to 2,236. Often with the assistance of other organizations, especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs), groupings of these communities and cooperatives were formed into federations, usually within provinces. In some cases these community organizations and federations were indigenous-specific and in other cases not (Cervone 1999). In the early 1960s, an important model for indigenous-only organizations was the Shuar federation in the southern Oriente (Salazar 1981). Spreading through other areas of the Amazonian region and into the Sierra, the new direction was toward indigenous-based, indigenous-organized, and indigenous-controlled local, regional, and eventually national confederations.<sup>2</sup>

The Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana (CONFENIAE) in the Oriente and Ecuador Runacunapac Riccharimui (ECUARUNARI) of the Sierra formed and coalesced, later joining together in the national confederation of indigenous peoples (CONAIE) in 1986. At that time the structural links or network between the base (small, dispersed indigenous communities) and democratically-elected, committed leaders at the regional and national levels was set in place. This in turn set the stage not only for effective mobilizations of tens of thousands of indígenas to press for advances in their rights and opportunities but also for the creation of a group of professional activists serving in leadership positions. The potential of this tightly-woven network of local, provincial, regional, and national organizations of indigenous peoples was realized through numerous civic actions, most notably the 1990 *levantamiento* and 1992 counter-mobilization in recognition of the Columbus quincentennial

(see Meisch 1992, Guerrero 1993, and Zamosc 1994) as well as the important 1994 mobilization against a neoliberal agricultural reform law (Selverston 1997 and Weiss 1999).

It is our contention that the development of these professional social movement organizations is also essential in explaining the emergence in 1995 of the Pachakutik political movement for two reasons. First, the problem of continuing the levels of energy and commitment from local to national levels for episodic civic mobilizations created pressure for a stable source of institutionalized resources (financial and organizational). Second, the successful creation of strong organizational bases made possible the development of an “educated activist cohort” of indígenas and consequent pressure for professional career opportunities. The decade of the 1980s was the first time in the history of the country that indigenous men and women in appreciable numbers matriculated in and graduated from universities, often with teaching or law degrees. Their energy and commitment, along with their educational attainment, propelled them into leadership positions at the provincial, regional, and national levels. This growing and maturing cohort of educated, committed, and experienced indigenous (and some *mestizo*) leaders created pressure to expand career options, making the already-existing ideas for direct political action more acceptable.

### **TAKING IT TO THE VOTING BOOTH: AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY TO TAKING IT TO THE STREETS**

Arguably, the civic action tactics of CONAIE’s and other indigenous organizations’ mass mobilization strategy have resulted in some notable successes, marked by independent and aggressive activities to press indigenous demands upon the state. Ever since the creation of Pachakutik in late 1995, CONAIE and regional indigenous confederations have taken politics to the streets on several occasions, most recently in the violence-laced *levantamiento* of January and February 2001. On the other hand, prior to the founding of Pachakutik, CONAIE’s leadership adamantly shunned traditional political parties and elections, claiming that the parties neither understood nor had ever acted on behalf of indígena concerns. CONAIE also doggedly withheld support from all candidates for public office, going so far as to pass a 1995 resolution forbidding its own leaders from holding public office (Becker 1996). Brushing aside invitations to be a vice-presidential candidate, CONAIE president Luis Macas announced in the fall of 1995 that he was a leader of the country’s indígenas, not a politician (Becker 1996).

Why did the leaders of the indigenous confederations make an about face in regards to pursuing an electoral strategy? According to Weiss (1999) and Luis Macas (2000), CONAIE leaders had been involved in serious discussions and plans for direct electoral participation in local and provincial contests since 1993. Though there certainly was some dissension about this, the strong arguments for a political movement, especially by Oriente indigenous leaders, eventually won out.

A crucial turn in the formation of this political movement was the development of a strategic alliance with a wide array of other social movements, mostly urban-based. Weiss (1999) carefully documents how a new generation of labor leaders, headed by Marcelo Román, worked diligently to forge a working alliance among diverse social movements (*Afro-Ecuadorianos*, women’s rights groups, student groups as well as other labor unions). This broad-based alliance was formed in 1995 as the Coordinadora de Movimientos Sociales (CMS) but CONAIE was not

part of it. It is important to reiterate that since the formation of CONAIE in 1986 (and for most local and provincial organizations well before 1986), the leadership had been intent on pursuing an agenda of advancing the economic, legal, social and cultural interests of indigenous peoples. While recognizing that these interests were at times in concert with the aims and agendas of other movements, the tendency of CONAIE had been to act independently and only briefly to enter tactical alliances. Weiss shows how the basis for an alliance between CONAIE (and its planned political arm) and the CMS came about. In late 1995 President Sixto Duran mandated a referendum (*Consulta Popular*) to gain acceptance for a number of his proposed policies, including neo-liberal reforms. With the CMS taking the lead, CONAIE and a number of other popular movements mobilized to oppose the proposals in the referendum. To the amazement of many, including leaders in this emerging alliance, each proposal was defeated.

The success noted above prompted discussions between leadership of the CMS and the new Pachakutik leaders, and in January 1996 the political movement officially named Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik-Nuevo País was announced. Freddy Ehlers, a well-known TV personality but political novice, had been recruited by leaders of the CMS to run for president and Luis Macas, president of CONAIE, would head the list of candidates for national deputy offices.

## **ELECTORAL RESULTS FROM 1996 AND 1998**

Five short months after Luis Macas' stunning announcement, he and seven other Pachakutik candidates won office as either national or provincial deputies in the *Congreso Nacional*. Although the eight deputies constituted only 10% of the total seats, this new political movement was, nonetheless, the fourth largest bloc in the Congress. Furthermore, if we consider all elected offices from city councilpersons (*concejales*) through congressional deputies, Pachakutik candidates won a total of 76 positions (Tribunal Supremo Electoral 1996). These results should be viewed as a significant accomplishment in light of the short time span between the official founding of the movement and the May elections, as well as the sparse resources available for campaigning. According to one newspaper account, Pachakutik won seven of every ten races it entered (Escobar 1996). This surprisingly quick success points to the role of the impressive network of indigenous organizations, associations, and community-level solidarity forged in the years previous to 1996, as well as the popular bases of support energized by leaders in the CMS.

Television personality Freddy Ehlers, the movement's presidential candidate, was a charismatic figure who represented a fresh face amongst professional politicians. He finished a strong third with just over 17% of the total votes cast (including blank and nullified ballots). While this position left Ehlers out of the runoff for the presidency, it immediately made him a political force to be reckoned with along with the movement he represented. Jaime Nebot of the conservative Social Christian Party (PSC) was the top vote getter in the first round followed closely by Abdalá Bucaram of the populist *roldoscista* party (PRE). Characterized as "el loco" by the press and the intelligentsia, Bucaram nevertheless easily defeated Nebot in the runoff, winning lopsided victories in provinces purportedly heavily populated by indígenas.<sup>3</sup>

Bucaram's presidency barely lasted six months as he was impeached for mental incompetence and removed from office by the Congress, which then installed its own leader, Fabian Alarcón, as interim president. Soon thereafter, an agreement was reached between Alarcón, the Congress

and the electoral commission providing for new elections for president, vice-president and Congress in 1998 rather than in 2000. The various political machinations that followed, some of which will be discussed in the next section of this paper, along with the devastation of el Niño along Ecuador's coast, produced a confusing and personality-dominated campaign leading up to the May 1998 elections.

The results of the 1998 elections were sobering for the Pachakutik movement. First, Freddy Ehlers, once again the movement's officially-endorsed presidential candidate, finished a disappointing fourth in a field of six candidates with slightly more than 12% of votes cast (see bottom row of Table 1, to be found at the end of the text). Due to constitutional reforms developed by a National Constituent Assembly (*Asamblea Nacional*) which began its work in 1997, the Congress was expanded to 121 seats, 20 of them to be selected nationally by a formula granting seats based on the percentage of votes for a party or movement (*en plancha*). The remaining 101 seats would be filled by provincial level contests by direct election of individual candidates rather than by party ticket. A total of eight seats were won by Pachakutik candidates or by candidates supported by Pachakutik in coalition with other parties, two nationally and six at the provincial level. These eight seats represent slightly more than six percent of the 121 congressional seats, a clear drop from the movement's showing in 1996.<sup>4</sup>

The electoral strengths and weaknesses of the Pachakutik movement are, to some extent, revealed through regional and provincial differences. In Tables 1, 2 and 3 all of which are to be found at the end of the text, the results for Pachakutik-endorsed candidates are shown for Ecuador's 21 provinces and are compared for the elections of 1996 and 1998.<sup>5</sup> Taking into account the population size of provinces, it is clear from all three tables, that most of the votes for Pachakutik were in the Sierra in both elections. Equally clear is the weakness of this movement in the coastal provinces which, taken together, contain half the country's population. Furthermore, Pachakutik is definitely a force in the thinly populated Oriente region, though there are some striking differences between the provinces and across the two elections.

The drop in support for Freddy Ehlers between 1996 and 1998 is due primarily to losses in the Sierra provinces. For example, Azuay contains Cuenca, which, is the third largest city in Ecuador and Ehler's birthplace. Ehlers and other Pachakutik candidates in that province dominated the 1996 elections. As Tables 1 and 2 clearly reveal, in the 1998 election both Ehlers and Pachakutik-sponsored congressional candidates experienced a greater than 50% drop in votes received. Ehlers and the Pachakutik movement also lost considerable electoral support between 1996 and 1998 in the Sierra's largest province, Pichincha, where the capital city of Quito is located.

Considering the Costa region as a whole, which is dominated by the province of Guayas, Ehlers received a slightly higher percentage of the votes in 1998 than he garnered in 1996. As revealed in Table 2, the Pachakutik-supported national ticket for congressional candidates also performed slightly better on the coast in 1998 than in 1996, but overall support remained at a very low level. The results for provincial deputies shown in Table 3 confirm that Pachakutik has not made much headway in the coastal provinces. In fact, this political movement did not elect even one local candidate in that region in either the 1996 or the 1998 elections.

In regards to the Oriente, Ehlers lost support in all five provinces between 1996 and 1998 (see Table 1). Regarding the national deputy elections, the results were mixed. The Pachakutik-supported list received fewer votes in three provinces and slightly more votes in two provinces in

1998 than in 1996 (Table 2). Assessing the performance of Pachakutik-supported candidates at the provincial level is more complicated. The reader will note in Table 3 that Pachakutik elected two deputies in 1996 and three deputies in 1998 in the Oriente; the additional victory occurred in the province of Morona Santiago. However, the 1998 vote in the province of Pastaza does not accurately reflect support for the Pachakutik movement. Pastaza's elected deputy in the 1998 election, Rafael Neptali Sancho, is a member of Democracia Popular (DP), a center-right party, who, in perhaps the strangest coalition that year, was endorsed and supported by the local Pachakutik organization. In both newspaper accounts and in the Congress itself, it is recognized that Neptali Sancho is clearly allied with DP. In short, what appears to be a one seat gain for Pachakutik is really no gain at all, leading to the conclusion that, at best, support for provincial Pachakutik candidates did not decline in the Oriente between 1996 and 1998. Overall, the results presented in Tables 13 disclose a drop in electoral support for Pachakutik candidates between the 1996 and the 1998 elections, most notably accounted for by a sizeable diminution of support in the provinces of the Sierra region. In the next section, we shall attempt to explain why the seemingly auspicious beginning of the Pachakutik political movement stalled and declined in a brief two year period, at least in the contests for the presidency and for national and provincial seats in Ecuador's Congreso Nacional, and how that decline is related to developments in the indigenous movement.

## **PACHAKUTIK AT THE POLLS: ASSESSING THE ELECTORAL OPTION**

As with all complex phenomena, numerous factors, some obvious and others obscure, are responsible for successes and failures in the inaugural years of the Pachakutik political movement. We make no claim that we have examined, or are even aware of, all the factors that have had some impact. We assert, however, that there are three main sources for explanation: (1) the larger context of *personalismo* and pre-existing, well-established political parties in Ecuador; (2) regional or ethnic group differences among indígenas in the country; (3) and the widening of ideological and tactical cleavages among leaders, activists and their popular base in the broader indigenous movement.

Personalismo and the Political Party System. The Pachakutik movement stepped onto a political landscape shaped, on the surface, by a pluralistic democracy with more than a dozen formal parties and other movements. But looming large like the volcanic mountains Cotopaxi and Chimborazo are two features common to other Latin American nations: the continuing importance of *personalismo* wherein formal parties may be little more than vehicles for charismatic and powerful leaders; and a few dominating, well-financed and well-organized party structures that find their strength in a circulating elite.<sup>6</sup> Though there are numerous historical examples of *personalismo* in Ecuador, one need only to return to 1996 and the election of Abdalá Bucaram to the presidency. Bucaram is the founder and supreme leader of the Partido Roldocista Ecuatoriano and support for PRE candidates is largely due to his personal charisma.

There are four dominant parties in Ecuador. The Partido Social Cristiano (PSC) and Bucaram's PRE are firmly entrenched in the coast while Democracia Popular (DP) and Izquierda Democrática (ID) are predominant in the Sierra. All have wealthy supporters, strong organizational structures and extensive client connections at the local level. In that respect, these parties represent some degree of elite fragmentation, partly reflective of the long-standing Quito-Guayaquil cleavage. To some extent the quick success of Pachakutik in 1996 may be linked to

these central features of Ecuadorian politics in that the “outsider” and “non-politician” status of their candidates appealed to many dissatisfied citizens, all of whom are required to vote<sup>7</sup>. Certainly much of the appeal of Freddy Ehlers was that, though well known because of his television program, he was a political outsider with a clean reputation and fresh ideas. Much the same was true for Luis Macas, who won a seat as national deputy, and most of the Pachakutik candidates at the provincial and local levels; 1996 was their first attempt to gain an elected position. In addition, the relative fragmentation of the country’s political and economic elite creates space for new parties and movements to vie for seats in a fractured parliament where no one party is able to muster more than one-third of the seats.

While the leadership of Pachakutik is aware of, and opposed to, both *personalismo* and the power of established parties, it is not a simple task to resist these influences. As will be discussed later, the on-off relationship between Ehlers and Pachakutik may be attributed, at least in part, to Ehler’s desire to chart his own course. Creating his own movement, Ciudadanos de Nuevo País, Ehlers seemed to emulate more and more the *personalismo* tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Another example of the impact of Ecuadorian *realpolitik* concerns Rodrigo Borja and ID. Borja is the founder and party leader of ID, and he served as President of Ecuador from 1988 to 1992. Ecuadorian presidents are barred from seeking immediate reelection. Therefore, the electoral fortunes of ID plummeted in 1992 and 1996 (in the latter case, ID did not even present a candidate for president).<sup>9</sup> Because of constitutional changes, former presidents were allowed to participate in the specially called 1998 presidential election and Borja decided to re-enter electoral politics. Borja, the heart and soul of ID, conducted an earnest and active campaign for the presidency and in doing so regenerated party activists and the base of support, located up and down the Sierra. Though Borja finished third, there is no doubt that some of his votes would otherwise have been for Ehlers, and it may well be that some of the electoral success of ID at the national, provincial and local levels cost Pachakutik candidates votes.<sup>10</sup>

Regional and Ethnic Cleavages. The creation of CONAIE in 1986 and that organization’s ability to mobilize indígenas throughout the Sierra and Oriente were indications of significant solidarity, especially in regard to certain basic aims (see Meisch 1992 and Selverston 1994). To some extent the organizational structure and civic mobilizations masked some important differences among indigenous groups. Given the different histories as well as contemporary differences of the disparate groups and communities that are included in the ethnic label indígena, cleavages in regard to ideology and political strategies are not surprising. Though not always the case, these cleavages often have a Sierra versus Oriente basis.

The third place finish of Ehlers in 1996 and the presence of the populist Bucaram in the July runoff produced the first public conflict within the Pachakutik movement. After Ehlers’ defeat in the May 1996 election, Pachakutik leadership refused to endorse either Bucaram or Nebot (*Hoy* June 12, 1996). However, that same month Valerio Grefa, supposedly speaking for indigenous organizations of the Oriente, unilaterally announced that Pachakutik was supporting Bucaram in the runoff election. This public endorsement elicited harsh criticism from both Ehlers and CONAIE leadership. In apparent retaliation to that criticism, Grefa further announced that Pachakutik was severing relations with Nuevo País (i.e., that part of the movement’s coalition comprised of non-indigenous popular sectors and organizations). Moreover, according to one newspaper account, Grefa tried to dissolve Pachakutik’s relations with CONAIE (*Hoy* June 13, 1996). Shortly after Bucaram won the runoff, Rafael Pandam, a



Shuar affiliated with CONFENIAE and one of the original proponents of Pachakutik, and Valerio Grefa pressured President Bucaram to create a new ministry of ethnic affairs (González 1996). Bucaram did so, appointing Pandam as minister and Grefa as sub-secretary. CONAIE leadership strongly opposed the creation of the ministry, seeing it as a move by Bucaram to consolidate his popularity and divide the indigenous movement. CONAIE's Nina Pacari also accused Grefa and Pandam of ignoring the organization's resolution and of following their own political interests (González 1996).<sup>11</sup>

The Sierra-Oriente tensions heightened after Luis Macas' resignation from CONAIE's presidency in order to run for Congress. This vacant leadership seat opened the door to a power struggle within CONAIE. In CONAIE's 1996 congress, the numerically dominant Sierra representatives chose José María Cabascango of ECUARUNARI<sup>12</sup>. However, the Oriente representatives elected one of their own, Antonio Vargas Huatatocha, a leader of the Organización de Pueblos Indígenas de Pastaza (OPIP). The Congress ended contentiously and without resolution. The day before it was to reconvene in Quito, a group of Shuar military commandos from the Oriente took over CONAIE's headquarters (*Hoy* January 16, 1997). This threat to the integrity and solidarity of CONAIE was finally resolved with the Sierra faction acquiescing to the Oriente's presidential choice of Antonio Vargas. Arturo Yumbay of the Sierra province of Bolívar was selected as CONAIE's vice-president.

In the aftermath of massive, widespread demonstrations against the policies of the government of Bucaram and his subsequent impeachment in February 1997 by the Congress, disagreements between Pachakutik and indigenous activists temporarily faded to the background as other issues consumed their time and energy. These included: (1) dealing with the conservative interim government of Fabian Alarcón; (2) a called public referendum for constitutional reform, which was approved by the electorate; and (3) conflicts regarding the timing and structure of the proposed constitutional assembly, which gave rise to more disputes within the indigenous movement. The manipulation of the timing and structure of the National Assembly, that would be empowered to write a new constitution, by conservative forces in Congress led CONAIE and other movements associated with the CMS to organize an alternative Popular National Assembly before elections for the official body took place.<sup>13</sup> Even in this assembly of like-minded activists disagreements occurred, some of which were related to ethnic group differences. For example, a major long-term aim of indigenous activists and CONAIE leaders has been to amend Article 1 of the current constitution so that Ecuador is explicitly recognized as multinational, multiethnic and multicultural. Part of the proposed amendment was to recognize both Spanish and Quichua as national languages. In the popular assembly, however, Achuar delegates demanded explicit recognition for their nationality and their language (*El Comercio* October 18, 1997).

Ideological and Tactical Cleavages. Between 1996 and 1998, there were numerous instances of disagreements and open conflicts, as well as renewed solidarity and obvious attempts at compromise, within the Pachakutik political movement, between Pachakutik and CONAIE, and between Pachakutik and leaders in the CMS. The on-off-on again relationship with Freddy Ehlers is a telling example. After the election of Bucaram, who received the support of many indígenas, coupled with criticism directed toward him by some activists in the Pachakutik movement, Ehlers decided (in 1997) to create his own movement, Ciudadanos de Nuevo País, and chart a more independent course. It soon became clear that regardless of the proposals and plans of anyone else, including Pachakutik and Rodrigo Borja, Ehlers was going to run for the presidency again in 1998.

In January 1998, during a general assembly meeting, CONAIE sided with the Oriente faction of Pachakutik in rejecting Ehlers as a candidate for the presidency (*El Comercio* January 13, 1998). In mid-March an extensive report in the newspaper *El Comercio* (March 14, 1998) makes it clear that leaders of Pachakutik were searching for a left-of-center front, especially in terms of a presidential/vice-presidential team that could effectively challenge front-runner Jamil Mahuad of DP. While on the one hand “threatening” to collect the 150,000 required signatures to register Luis Macas as their own presidential candidate, movement leaders were also attempting to promote Paco Moncayo, a recently retired General and hero of the 1995 border war with Peru, as the presidential candidate for ID instead of former president Borja, whom many indigenous leaders resented for past policies and actions. This effort by Pachakutik leaders for a united broad left front did not work as Borja went forward as the presidential candidate and Moncayo agreed to head the list of candidates for national deputies of ID. Meanwhile, Freddy Ehlers was already campaigning for president under the banner of his own movement and there was even talk of a “realignment” with him by some members of Pachakutik, including congressman Napoleón Saltos.

In mid-March, approximately two months before the general elections, CONAIE and Pachakutik did an impressive about-face. CONAIE’s Antonio Vargas and Pachakutik’s José María Cabascango together announced their support for Ehlers and the formation of a coalition between Pachakutik, Ehlers’ Ciudadanos de Nuevo País and the Socialist Party for the presidency and for national deputy seats (*El Telégrafo* March 21, 1998).<sup>14</sup> Ehlers recruited the well-known and respected socialist León Roldós, former vice-president under Osvaldo Hurtado, to head the list of national deputies and Dra. Nina Pacari was placed second, representing Pachakutik in this national alliance.

The national coordinating committee of Pachakutik did not attempt to forge common lists (coalitions) at the provincial level. As shown in the footnotes to Table 3, the national-level coalition was followed in only eight of the twenty-one provinces. What the footnotes only begin to reveal is the amount of dissatisfaction and dissension in the ranks of Pachakutik activists with the decision to support Ehlers and have a coalition list for the national deputy seats. In our interviews with Pachakutik activists and elected officials after the fact, the consensus was that it would have been better not to have aligned with Ehlers again and simply to have foregone the presidential contest.

In the interim between the elections of 1996 and the elections of 1998, two factions or groups appear to have emerged within the Pachakutik movement. One, which we term the “mainstream group,” has predominated in seeking coalitions, compromises, elected and appointed offices, and negotiations to achieve specific aims. The second, the “radical purist” group, tends to eschew coalitions, compromises, and view as secondary the electoral strategy. The radical group seeks a more thoroughgoing transformation of civil society that will lead to a true participatory democracy of the masses. Milton Cáceres, Director of the Escuela de Educación y Cultura Andina of the Universidad Estatal de Bolívar, detailed a major difference between these two groups. In the alternative or popular assembly organized by CONAIE and the CMS and in which Pachakutik was a major player, a significant minority of the participants, including Cáceres, did not want Pachakutik to participate in the officially sanctioned Asamblea Nacional since it would undoubtedly be controlled by entrenched political and economic elites.<sup>15</sup> But Pachakutik’s national leadership did present candidates for the Asamblea Nacional, opting for the mainstream path and pursuing their agenda of fomenting economic and social policies

favorable to indigenous and non-indigenous “popular masses” within the framework of institutionalized power.

These pragmatic maneuvers continued in the summer of 1998 when the Pachakutik deputies sided with DP and more conservative factions in the first action of the new Congress, electing a president of that body. In return for Pachakutik’s support of DP’s Juan José Pons for President of Congress, Pachakutik’s Nina Pacari was selected as second vice-president. Such pragmatic maneuvers--stock-in-trade for traditional parties in Ecuador--may have had the unintended consequence of creating the impression of politics-as-usual among the indigenous and popular base of the Pachakutik movement.

Such a possibility was expressed by Luis Macas in April 1999.<sup>16</sup> Macas describes three tendencies within the organized indigenous movement, which we will call the *ideólogos*, the *pragmatistas*, and the *sinvergüenzas*. The *ideólogos*, similar to what we have called the radical purists in Pachakutik, believe that ethics are paramount and that militant upholding of principles, stemming from the organizations in the base communities, should be the most important guide to political action. Macas’ descriptions of the other two tendencies are pejorative to the extent that there is precious little difference between them. Macas describes the *pragmatistas* as those in the movement who are willing to make deals in order to obtain positions and personal or group favors to the point of disregarding fundamental principles and philosophies. The *sinvergüenzas* are simply concerned with the shameless pursuit of personal self-interest. Macas further claims that most Ecuadorians believe that CONAIE’s leaders are separated from their social base, entering into tacit agreements with the national government behind the backs of the base organizations and the Indian peoples.<sup>17</sup> Macas’ biting critique unquestionably suggests that both Pachakutik and CONAIE leadership have failed to stay attuned not only to what the rank-and-file are doing but what they are thinking. What the rank-and-file did in the 1998 elections was to refrain from casting enough ballots to assure that Pachakutik and Pachakutik-in-coalition candidates maintained at least the percentage of seats they had won in 1996. If indígenas and their political allies were thinking that Pachakutik was engaging in “politics as usual,” it would raise serious questions regarding both Pachakutik’s future and the hope that indigenous goals might, at least, be partially arrived at in the electoral arena.<sup>18</sup>

## CONAIE AND THE ABORTIVE GOLPE

The January 21, 2000 takeover of the Congreso Nacional by indígenas, and the (thwarted) *golpe de estado* by CONAIE president Antonio Vargas in coalition with segments of the military seem to offer powerful evidence against Macas’ assertion that current indigenous leaders favor dispassionate discourse over civic action. In fact, Vargas, in an interview with Ana Angulo (*Hoy*, January 24, 2000) revealed that CONAIE leadership had been planning a gradual uprising since November 1999, and, furthermore, that they had numerous contacts and meetings with military officers during that time, though he denied that a coup or rebellion had been jointly planned.

As noted in the introduction, the attempted golpe raised serious issues about the relationship between the social movement and the political movement. Among the diputados who were forced to “resign” their seats during the occupation of Congress were six Pachakutik deputies, including former CONAIE *dirigente* and the Congress’ second vice-president, Nina Pacari. It is

not a giant leap to suggest that CONAIE leaders saw the Pachakutik diputados, along with the rest of the deputies, as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution. Though at least three of the Pachakutik deputies publicly announced their resignation during the heady moments of January 21, in fact all of them retained their seats in Congress. Soon after the failed golpe, CONAIE and the CMS called for a Consulta Popular and one of the issues they proposed putting to the Ecuadorian people was to dissolve Congress, an aim that Antonio Posso, Pachakutik diputado, explicitly rejected (*Hoy*, January 29, 2000).

A second issue provoked by the abortive takeover concerns the methods used by Vargas and company. The apparent back-room negotiations engaged in by CONAIE leaders with the military smacks of the same “politics as usual” to which the indigenous movement has long objected. So while this extra-parliamentary action could be seen as a resurgence of CONAIE’s radical street militancy, it can also be accused of the same pragmatic trampling on principles as the parliamentary machinations of Pachakutik. While one can make a distinction between liberal democracy’s preoccupation with procedures and substantive democracy’s concern for outcomes, if the attempted golpe had been carried out by factions of the military in alliance with groups wishing to disband Congress so that the government’s plans for privatization and dollarization could be advanced without the encumbrance of parliamentary procedures, it is surely the case that spokespersons for the indigenous movement would have condemned the coup for its anti-democratic action.

A third issue sparked by the coup attempt is the concern expressed by some observers sympathetic to the movement that the events of January 21 might negatively impact Pachakutik’s performance in the May 2000 provincial and local elections. The attempted golpe provoked additional cleavages and conflicts both within CONAIE and between CONAIE and Pachakutik, and the subsequent dissension, distrust and discontent did not bode well for Pachakutik candidates. Despite claims by the Pachakutik leadership that the political movement is distinct from the indigenous social movement, many Ecuadorians continue to identify Pachakutik as an Indian election vehicle. While there was some public sympathy expressed for CONAIE’s role in the ousting of Mahuad, there was also fear that indígenas, long occupying the bottom of the country’s social and political orders, were seen as becoming too “uppity,” possibly resulting in a massive routing of Pachakutik’s candidates in the May *comicios*.

### ***EL RESURGIMIENTO: THE MAY 2000 LOCAL ELECTIONS***

The fears of a backlash against Pachakutik resulting from the abortive coup of January 21, 2000 did not come to pass. Instead, Pachakutik candidates waged vigorous campaigns based on platforms of anti-corruption and political reform that substantially reversed their losses of 1998, at least at the provincial and local levels. The relative success of Pachakutik candidates was the biggest surprise of the elections. Most notably, Pachakutik won 33 *alcaldías* and five *prefecturas*. Twenty-seven of the mayoralty races were won by Pachakutik along with the remaining six won in alliances with other parties (*El Comercio*, February 3, 2001). In addition, Pachakutik won numerous seats on city and provincial councils as well as on the newly created *juntas parroquiales*, especially in the Sierra.

Not surprisingly, leaders and activists in the Pachakutik movement viewed the results as an unqualified success, not only for the proposals of their movement but also in terms of citizen

support for the actions taken to force Mahuad from office. In an interview with one of the authors shortly after the elections, Luis Macas stated that the election of so many Pachakutik candidates for local offices was important as a base for future success in elections for Congress and even the presidency (Macas 2000).

On the other hand, observers and analysts not associated with Pachakutik or the indigenous movement were considerably less sanguine in their appraisals of the results. One point is that almost all of the victories of Pachakutik occurred in small cities or rural cantons where a majority of the population, or a sizeable minority, are indígenas. Pachakutik had virtually no success in larger cities or in areas where the number of indígenas is quite small. Though Pachakutik did present lists of candidates either on their own or in alliance with a party such as Movimiento Popular Democrático (MPD), Ecuador's tiny Marxist party, the movement has had no success in breaking through the clientilism of the PSC and PRE in many areas of the coast. Another point is that some of the impressive victories claimed by Pachakutik are not really their candidates but rather candidates presented by another party that local Pachakutik leaders endorsed through a formal alliance. These candidates were likely winners or would have been in a tight contest and the bloc voting by indígenas helped to secure a victory. Two of the five *prefecturas* won by Pachakutik fit into this category.

## **DISCUSSION**

While both the leaderships of CONAIE and Pachakutik have always insisted that Pachakutik is not simply the "electoral arm" of indigenous confederations, rank-and-file indigenous folk constitute a sizeable block of the electorate to whom Pachakutik appeals. Although the reclamation of their identity and other symbolic goals have been and still are important for indigenous folk, the solidarity and militancy among indígenas in Ecuador has been based around the economic goals of increased land-holding and, more generally, improved standards of living.<sup>19</sup> But it is clear that in recent years the majority of Ecuador's population, including indigenous groups, have experienced declines in their standard of living.<sup>20</sup> The unprecedented devaluation of the sucre during 1999 intensified the depth and extent of poverty in the country, rendering even more problematic the achievement of long-standing indigenous demands for control of their land, for access to substantial agricultural credits from the state, for political autonomy in indigenous communities--in short, for their fair share of the material benefits of Ecuadorian society.

Pachakutik as a political movement that claims to speak for all members of the country's popular classes, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, has emphasized these material goals in its appeals to voters. In the few years since its birth, it is a fair assessment that Pachakutik's electoral strategy has failed to make much, if any, difference in addressing these pressing economic concerns. On the other hand, CONAIE in alliance with the CMS and other social movements has had some dramatic impacts in this regard utilizing the same kind of street tactics that brought it to the forefront of national politics in 1990. While CONAIE's successes have been fundamentally short-lived, efforts to postpone the implementation of repugnant government policy proposals--such as President Mahuad's announcement in the summer of 1999 that he would raise the price of gasoline that was delayed but imposed the following year, nonetheless--they have resulted in concrete accomplishments for the people of Ecuador. By contrast, in the

four short years since its inception, Pachakutik has had virtually no impact at the national level and, thus far, an undetermined impact at the provincial and local levels.

In addition, there may be some costs to the electoral strategy undertaken by the Pachakutik political movement. Gaining elective offices and participating in political structures still dominated by more conservative *blanco-mestizo* sectors, have produced strange alliances, shifting policies and decisions, and public internal conflicts. These are the constraints imposed upon a reform-minded movement by the political structure of the nation. Earnest calls for the transformation of current electoral democracy to a more participatory and responsive system by indigenous leaders (and representatives of other popular sectors) have not been advanced via the Pachakutik movement. It is the contention of the present authors that in the near-term future the possibility that a political movement like Pachakutik will have a significant impact on the political structure, and therefore advance the interests of indigenous peoples and more broadly the poorer citizens of Ecuador, is quite low. However, the continued existence of Pachakutik along with the proactive, broadened civic mobilization capabilities of CONAIE carries the possibility that indigenous activists (and with them, the indigenous base) would be fully included in a left-of-center alliance that could win the presidency and constitute the largest bloc in Congress. It is unfortunate that our final assessment must conclude pessimistically that such an alliance, given the recent political history of the country, would likely exhibit strains and fractures, be ineffective, and ultimately break apart.

Table 1.

Percentage of Votes Received by *Pachakutik*-Endorsed Presidential Candidate  
in the 1996 and 1998 Elections, by Province.\*

<u>PROVINCE</u>	<u>1996 PERCENTAGE</u>	<u>1998 PERCENTAGE</u>
<u>SIERRA</u>		
Azuay	44.0	21.3
Bolívar	14.2	8.8
Cañar	29.3	22.3
Carchi	24.6	17.0
Cotopaxi	23.7	18.1
Chimborazo	23.8	16.1
Imbabura	26.0	21.8
Loja	17.0	10.1
Pichincha	28.2	16.4
Tungurahua	30.2	27.7
<u>COSTA</u>		
El Oro	10.1	10.3
Esmeraldas	7.7	5.0
Guayas	5.6	6.7
Los Rios	4.6	5.2
Manabí	9.3	6.3

Galapagos	17.4	12.0
<u>ORIENTE</u>		
Morona Santiago	26.2	12.8
Napo	28.1	15.8
Pastaza	15.9	6.7
Zamora Chinchipe	15.3	11.4
Sucumbíos	22.8	18.2
<hr/>		
NATION	17.3	12.5

\*Freddy Ehlers was the presidential candidate in both contests. In 1996 he ran as the Pachakutik political movement candidate whereas in 1998 he ran as the candidate of his own political movement, Ciudadanos de Nuevo País, and was endorsed by both Pachakutik and the Socialist Party.

Table 2.

Percentage of Votes Received by *Pachakutik* National Deputy Candidates (1996) and *Pachakutik-in-Alliance* National Deputy Candidates (1998), by Province.

<u>PROVINCE</u>	<u>1996 PERCENTAGE</u>	<u>1998 PERCENTAGE</u>
<u>SIERRA</u>		
Azuay	26.6	11.1
Bolívar	9.2	9.9
Cañar	14.5	16.3



Carchi	8.4	6.9
Cotopaxi	13.4	9.8
Chimborazo	14.7	8.5
Imbabura	12.5	13.0
Loja	7.8	6.7
Pichincha	12.9	8.8
Tungurahua	13.7	11.7
<u>COSTA</u>		
El Oro	4.1	4.5
Esmeraldas	3.0	2.7
Guayas	2.2	4.9
Los Rios	1.9	2.2
Manabí	2.7	3.1
Galapagos	7.3	6.8
<u>ORIENTE</u>		
Morona Santiago	16.6	17.7
Napo	21.3	16.3
Pastaza	13.6	7.3
Zamora Chinchipe	6.7	8.7
Sucumbíos	17.1	9.5
NATION	8.4	7.2

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Table 3.

Percentage of Votes Received by *Pachakutik*-Sponsored Candidates for  
Provincial Deputy in the 1996 and 1998 Elections, by Province.\*

<u>PROVINCE</u>	<u>1996</u> <u>PERCENT</u>	<u>DEPUTIES</u> <u>ELECTED</u>	<u>1998</u> <u>PERCENT</u>	<u>DEPUTIES</u> <u>ELECTED</u>
<u>SIERRA</u>				
Azuay <sup>3</sup>	22.1	2	18.3	0
Bolívar <sup>1</sup>	6.8	0	19.0	1
Cañar <sup>1</sup>	10.3	0	8.9	0
Carchi <sup>2</sup>	-----	0	5.9	0
Cotopaxi <sup>1</sup>	10.8	1	9.3	1
Chimborazo <sup>4</sup>	12.7	1	7.6	0
Imbabura <sup>2</sup>	11.5	0	16.1	1
Loja <sup>2</sup>	-----	0	8.7	0
Pichincha <sup>2</sup>	10.8	1	10.6	0
<u>COSTA</u>				
El Oro <sup>2</sup>	-----	0	4.7	0
Esmeraldas	-----	0	-----	0
Guayas	-----	0	-----	0
Los Rios <sup>4</sup>	1.2	0	2.2	0
Manabí	-----	0	4.0	0
Galapagos	-----	0	-----	0
<u>ORIENTE</u>				

Morona Santiago <sup>1</sup>	15.1	0	27.8	1
Napo <sup>1</sup>	19.7	1	24.5	1
Pastaza <sup>5</sup>	10.3	1	24.4	1
Zamora Chinchipe <sup>3</sup>	-----	0	10.6	0
Sucumbíos	13.5	0	-----	0

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\*The numeric superscripts in the table refer only to the 1998 elections.

1 = Pachakutik only

2 = Pachakutik / Partido Socialista-Frente Amplia / Ciudadanos de Nuevo País

3 = Pachakutik / Partido Socialista-Frente Amplia / Izquierda Democrática

4 = Pachakutik / Partido Socialista-Frente Amplia

5 = Pachakutik / Democracia Popular

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This research was undertaken between 1996 and 2000. The authors received funding from the Research Development Committee and the Office of International Programs of East Tennessee State University and the first author was awarded a Fulbright research grant for Summer 2000. This essay is a revised version of a paper presented to the 46<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the South Eastern Council of Latin American Studies, Lafayette, Louisiana, March 18-20, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>Blanco-mestizo Ecuadorian and North American/European scholars, researchers, and advisors were to some extent involved in all phases, but real leadership and decision-making was and is in the hands of men and women who themselves and others identify as indigenous.

<sup>3</sup>We use the term “purportedly” deliberately given the lack of an agreed upon concept of who is and who is not an indígena. Estimates as to the percentage of the population that is indígena vary from about 10% to more than half (see, inter alia, Knapp 1991; Zamosc 1995; and Pacari 1996). In some instances, it appears that the estimates vary according to the political agenda of the estimator (see Beck and Mijeski 1997 and Beck 1998).

<sup>4</sup>As will become apparent below, the actual number of congressional deputies who are part of the Pachakutik political movement is only six. As a proportion of total seats (five percent) this is a clear decline from 1996.

<sup>5</sup>The reader should be aware of the tremendous population size differences between provinces. The largest provinces are, in descending order, Guayas (Costa), Pichincha (Sierra), Manabí (Costa), Los Ríos (Costa), and Azuay (Sierra). All of the Oriente provinces are sparsely populated.

<sup>6</sup>For a recent treatment of Latin American parties and elections, see Domínguez (1994). For a brief, pre-Pachakutik, discussion of Ecuador’s parties and party system, see Corkill and Cubitt (1988).

<sup>7</sup>Ecuadorian law requires all citizens between the ages of 18 and 65 to vote unless there is a health condition that prevents them. There is little direct enforcement of this law but in order to have a valid national identity card the citizen must have proof of having gone to a polling station. Despite this, absenteeism is fairly high, between 35 and 40 percent. Furthermore, a significant minority of those who do vote nullify their ballot or leave it blank.

<sup>8</sup>Several of the Pachakutik activists whom we interviewed between 1998 and 2000, made the claim that Ehlers refused to be restrained by the demands of the Pachakutik movement, instead he asserted himself as the caudillo standard bearer.

<sup>9</sup>It has been claimed by a number of persons whom we interviewed that Borja quietly supported Ehlers’s presidential bid in 1996, which resulted in ID’s not putting forth its own candidate in the center-left position.

<sup>10</sup>Borja garnered almost 16% of the vote followed by Ehlers with slightly more than 12%. Yet it is doubtful that if only one or the other had run, they would have superseded Noboa to gain a run-off spot.

<sup>11</sup>Conflicts between Oriente indigenous organizations and CONAIE have surfaced over other issues also. For example, in 1993 the U.S.-based Maxus petroleum company succeeded in winning the support of the Huaorani Nation of the Ecuadorian Amazon (ONHAE), despite CONAIE's demand for a 15 year moratorium on oil exploration (Jochnick 1995).

<sup>12</sup>Cabascango was the first coordinator for the Pachakutik/Nuevo País delegation in the Congreso Nacional.

<sup>13</sup>For a discussion of intra-Pachakutik conflicts regarding participation in the Asamblea Nacional Popular versus the officially-sanctioned Asamblea Nacional see Mijeski and Beck 1998. For more detailed analysis of the politics surrounding both the Asamblea Nacional Popular and the official constitutional reform bodies see Andolina 1998.

<sup>14</sup>Each recognized political party or movement participating in the 1998 election submitted a list of twenty candidates for the twenty national deputy seats that would become available in the newly reconstituted Congress.

<sup>15</sup>Authors's interview with M. Cáceres on Aug. 5, 1998.

<sup>16</sup>As expressed by Macas in *Boletín I.C.C.I.: publicación mensual del Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas*, año 1, no. 1, pp. 1-5.

<sup>17</sup>It is interesting to note that this editorial was reprinted in the official Pachakutik publication, *Revista de debate político* in July 1999, right before their first national Congress.

<sup>18</sup>A partial analysis of the 1998 elections at the cantón level reveals large numbers of blank and nullified ballots and high rates of absenteeism in areas estimated to be heavily populated by indigenous peoples.

<sup>19</sup>A 1992 CONAIE document explicitly says that "The central goal articulated by the indigenous movement is the fight for land: having a material base such as land is fundamental for living a dignified life" (CONAIE 1992). Going further, anthropologist Lynn Meisch asserts that "The demand for genuine land reform is the glue that binds the indigenous movement. Many indígenas do not have a clue, and could care less, about the rest of CONAIE's agenda" (1992:58).

<sup>20</sup>Recent data collected by the Centro de Estudios y Análisis reported that in 1997 slightly more than half of Ecuador's population was poor, with 20% of them living in extreme poverty (*El Comercio* Aug. 10, 1998). As evidence of the recent drastic decline in living standards, the Ecuadorian Census Bureau reported that a survey of living standards at the end of 1999 revealed that 69% of the population is poor and 34% are indigent (*El Comercio* March 1, 2000).