

3-13-2009

# Electoral Process Fractures Ecuador's Indigenous Movement

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur>

---

## Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Electoral Process Fractures Ecuador's Indigenous Movement." (2009). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/13762>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## **Electoral Process Fractures Ecuador's Indigenous Movement**

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Ecuador

Published: 2009-03-13

The April 26 general elections, in which Ecuadorans will choose 5,964 national and local officials, including the president, have brought new divisions in the Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik Nuevo Pais (MUPP-NP), considered the political arm of the once-powerful Confederacion de Nacionalidades Indigenas del Ecuador (CONAIE).

As in previous electoral processes, Ecuador's indigenous movement has been unable to avoid the factionalism caused by party interests that were able to influence the principal indigenous leaders. Nevertheless, this time the situation has become more complex with Pachakutik leaders deciding to ignore policy instructions from CONAIE's Consejo de Gobierno.

In 1990, CONAIE organized the first indigenous uprising and was able to completely paralyze the country, setting off a process to transform the structure of the Ecuadoran state and aimed at overcoming the economic and political exclusion in which indigenous groups lived, and still live.

### ***Pachakutik becomes political vehicle of indigenous***

The indigenous mobilizations demonstrated the power that CONAIE had acquired, but it could not penetrate party structures, traditionally dominated by the principal economic groups. Consequently, in 1996, the indigenous movement decided to create its own political party to participate in the elections.

In that effort, Pachakutik aligned with various mestizo leftist movements, but kept as its core guiding principal the political project designed by CONAIE and acted as CONAIE's representative in the electoral contests. Despite its initial successful electoral participation, Pachakutik could not overcome the diversity of visions within the movement, and so in each successive electoral process it had to face new divisions, beginning with a distancing from the mestizo sectors and the increasingly heated accusations that Pachakutik was becoming an ethnist movement.

Meanwhile, the indigenous leadership accused the mestizo sectors of ignoring CONAIE's political mandate and of not having a social base. Pachakutik's alliance with the Partido Sociedad Patriotica (PSP), which brought former President Lucio Gutierrez to power in 2002, almost caused CONAIE to disappear, in part the result of political mistakes by Pachakutik, which had begun to make decisions leaving out CONAIE. Its diminishment was also caused by the system of repression implemented by the Gutierrez administration, despite the presence in the government of three indigenous ministers, who were dismissed when Pachakutik broke with Gutierrez after six months.

### ***Correa loses much indigenous support***

In 2006, a completely fractured Pachakutik was unable to appreciate the political moment and rejected an alliance with the emerging urban movement concentrated in Alianza Pais (AP), which brought President Rafael Correa to power. Luis Macas, a longtime leader of the indigenous

movement, had been considered for Correa's running mate, but he ran instead on the Pachakutik ticket. Since taking office, Correa has deepened indigenous divisions. Since the historic recognition of indigenous struggles as Correa symbolically assumed power in a remote indigenous town where he had been a volunteer teacher, the president has worked to separate indigenous leaders into "good" and "bad" leaders, as he frequently describes them during his Saturday radio broadcasts.

For Correa, good leaders are those who have accepted government directives, and bad ones are those who have opposed them, especially those who head sectors that have mobilized against the mining law, expanding oil exploitation, marketing genetically modified (GM) products, or eliminating Kichwa (Quechua) as an official language.

As an example of a bad indigenous leader, Correa singled out Amazon leader Monica Chuji, who was communications secretary and government spokesperson at the start of his term and later was a delegate in the Asamblea Nacional Constituyente.

In that assembly, differences were becoming apparent between indigenous thinking and the urban vision of Alianza Pais. Chuji finally left the governing party and embarked on a campaign to defend the rights of indigenous peoples, questioning the change of direction in the government's political program (see NotiSur, 2008-10-10).

In the last two months, Correa has lashed out against autonomous indigenous institutions such as the Consejo de Desarrollo de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indigenas (CODENPE), taking away its funding, and the Direccion Nacional de Educacion Intercultural Bilingue (DINEIB), incorporating bilingual education into the regular educational program.

In response to the Correa administration's actions, CONAIE assumed a critical position and rejected government measures that violate indigenous rights and lands. Marlon Santi, president of the CONAIE governing council, was also on the government's list of bad indigenous leaders, a list that is slowing getting longer.

Leftist sectors and politicians, which in the beginning supported Alianza Pais proposals, have been gradually distancing themselves from the government. They created the Coordinadora por la Unidad de la Izquierda y por la Vida, made up, in addition to regional indigenous organizations and leftist movements, of environmental groups, pro-development nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), some church sectors, and neighborhood organizations.

CONAIE joined this new movement and decided that Pachakutik should follow suit. However, Pachakutik leaders, headed by national coordinator Jorge Guaman and Humberto Cholango, president of ECUARUNARI, the organization that groups together highland indigenous, did not accept the directive from CONAIE's Consejo de Gobierno, demonstrating that Pachakutik no longer represents CONAIE in elections and is making its own decisions.

Despite the elimination of indigenous institutions promoted from the office of the president, Pachakutik, with some ECUARUNARI leaders, decided to align with the government party in the

provinces with the largest indigenous populations for the upcoming elections, while CONAIE and its affiliates on the coast and in the Amazon are backing the Coordinadora, running Monica Chuji as first national candidate for the Asamblea and supporting the presidential ticket of Martha Roldos of the Red Etica y Democratica and former priest Eduardo Delgado of the Polo Alternativo Democratico (PDA).

Although the governing party seems headed to an electoral victory that will give Correa a second term, the Coordinadora presents a new electoral option in which indigenous political programs seem to have a new home, while Pachakutik's political life seems to have run its course now that the indigenous bases have asked for a general assembly to evaluate the role of this political movement. "Pachakutik has lost its reason for being and should end," said Monica Chuji.

-- End --