

**Understanding Populism:  
A New Look of the 'New Left' in Latin America.**

**Participatory Democracy in Ecuador<sup>(\*)</sup>**

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**Brief Background:**

- **1978-1979** return to civilian gov't.
  
- **1979-1996** four popularly-elected presidents complete their terms.
  
- **1996-2007** three popular-elected presidents are defenestrated, replaced by those in succession line: Vice President (two) chairman of Congress (one)

**During the latter period of instability:**

- Political parties increasingly out of touch with civil society;
  
- Increased role of "social movements" fostered by foreign NGOs. So it is acknowledged in President Correa's Government Plan:

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<sup>(\*)</sup> Text in English, quotes in Spanish original.

"El desarrollo de la participación ciudadana y de su incidencia en las instituciones públicas aparece como una cuestión emergente pero aún marginal en el debate público y que no ha recibido la debida atención desde las instituciones centrales del aparato estatal.

Son sobre todo los poderes locales, los movimientos sociales, las ONG y la cooperación internacional los que han procurado su promoción".

Dominantly among these emerging groups: the Indigenous movement, Conaie.

Conaie found a political party Pachakútik, in alliance with political organizations headed by mestizos. But later Conaie decided to expel most mestizos and turn Pachakútik into an Indigenous party.

Pachakútik has not been able to muster a sizeable voting in presidential elections:

- 0.8% of the valid vote in 2002,
- 2.2% in 2006.

It is thus a failed attempt to incorporate an important group of the politically excluded, the Indigenous into a party that could aggregate interests and win elections.

A new group enters the scene: the young, excellently educated, dominantly Quito-based (where the NGOs mostly are) middle class. This group was key in defenestrating Gutiérrez

(2005). They adopted the name given them by Gutiérrez (forajidos).

President Palacio felt the need to incorporate a member of "forajidos" to the Cabinet. He chose Rafael Correa, appointing him Minister of Economy.

Correa campaigned from the Ministry, proved charismatic, and resigned to run for President. In November 2006 he was elected President, under a "participatory democracy" banner.

This event is concerned with various issues, which we shall try to address concerning Ecuador. One is if governments have taken concrete steps to foster greater inclusion of previously-excluded groups, and if so, through what mechanisms.

In the Ecuadoran case previous governments have not done much, and regarding Correa's it is too soon to judge. But social inclusion is a key element in Correa's Plan. It is based on fostering communal forms of production and labor participation in the business decision-making process.

Thus, we read in Correa's Government Plan:

"Objetivo 10: Garantizar el acceso a la participación pública-política".

"Una parte sustantiva del ejercicio de la democracia es la participación ciudadana que debería ir de la mano con la representación política".

### **Principios y orientaciones:**

III. ¿Cuál es el sentido del cambio? Principios y orientaciones del Plan de Desarrollo.

Existen un conjunto de procesos de innovación institucional y valores políticos de fuerte tradición social que ya existen y anticipan los contenidos de tal poder colectivo democrático. Cabe nombrar al menos cinco:

a) La vigencia de dinámicas de organización colectiva autónoma como los movimientos sociales (indígena, ecologista, de mujeres, etc.), las redes públicas (migrantes, niñez, deuda externa, etc.) y otras asociaciones civiles;

b) La existencia de dispositivos participativos, sobre todo en el nivel local...

c) El funcionamiento de mecanismos de deliberación pública que promueven la toma colectiva de decisiones.

[Note: Both (b) and (c) at local gov't. level].

d) El incentivo de dinámicas de economía solidaria/cooperativa que orientan su desarrollo desde las necesidades de la gente; y

e) El fomento de principios de interacción social asentados en la idea de la solidaridad, la fraternidad, la comunidad de comportamiento.

And

Política 10.7: Propiciar el empoderamiento organizativo del mundo del trabajo.

Líneas estratégicas:

4. Implementar reglas de co-decisión que obliguen a incluir una representación de los trabajadores en los consejos de administración de empresas que superen cierto tamaño.

Another issue is how do actions of Correa's government influence the organization of civil society and the conflicts within civil society, if innovative forms of participation expand access to policymaking and whether these forms are representative.

At a formal level, the government is changing the Constituent and legal landscape, working with activist groups, bypassing political parties.

¿But to what extent are the so called spokespersons for these groups, representative of the rank and file? Are not the "social" groups ruled by cliques, as are the parties they pushed aside? Is it not the case that some groups are just labels that give legitimacy to individuals who represent no one?

In polities which measures population in the tens of millions, is it not the case that when national issues are concerned "participatory democracy" is not feasible, that representation is necessary?

In which case participatory democracy means that government is an interaction of a leader with representatives from interest groups, not by parties that aggregate diverse interests. Interest groups that in turn, lack a procedure to elect representatives.

The current government increasingly looks as a caudillista regime, in which oil revenue is available to grant subsidies to the poorest, who provide the backbone of the caudillo's electorate.

**The President:**

- Riding high on his popularity (as measured by polls); through actions of small activist groups: his own supporters, Conaie and MPD (formerly a Maoist party that controls the teachers' union); with the passive supervision of the police:

Dismissed the opposition in Congress, later shut Congress down, and chased the members of the Constitutional Court out of the Court premises; the rump Congress replaced the justices with members of the groups that did the chasing out.

Upon the ouster of the opposition from Congress, said the President:

"Es por un lado una fiesta democrática porque por primera vez los sectores populares llegan hasta el palacio Nacional sin que sean reprimidos y por el contrario su fusión armónica con las fuerzas de orden expresa un símbolo del país que estamos construyendo...

Nuestras elites despectivamente la llaman democracia tumultuaria, cuando es tan solo democracia participativa, y finalmente el despertar de todo un pueblo". (Presidencia, 15 March 2007)

Later, members of a Constitutional Assembly were elected under a statute that banned direct media advertising by candidates. But the President carried out an all-out media campaign in favor of his movement's lists of candidates.

President Hugo Chávez observed:

"Ecuador está pasando por el proceso que hicimos aquí hace ocho años y está encontrando las mismas resistencias que tuvimos aquí con los sectores oligárquicos". (Expreso, 22 March)

How does "radical" or "participatory" democracy relate to political democracy?

In our view participatory democracy enhances political democracy if the displaced parties are electoral machineries ran by cliques irresponsible to popular needs. But deteriorates political democracy if it means government of a caudillo supported by political activists who brand

themselves representatives of people to whom they are not accountable.

Participatory democracy, then, may translate in more democracy inasmuch representative democracy proved ineffective to deal with society's ill. But it is nonetheless flawed and may result in rule by a self-perpetuating elite. It is by no means an alternative to a functional representative democracy.

Let us look into how does Participatory Democracy relate to Constitutional Liberalism.

Any deeply reformative, hands-on government has issues with Constitutional Liberalism, which is based on checks and balances and a mistrust of governments that seek to concentrate power.

In the Ecuadoran experience, the government's set of mind (too soon to speak of realities) goes beyond these "issues". The government considers that participatory democracy requires a radical flattening of inequalities in the economic, social, and political realms, and therefore is at odds with a market economy and its inherent reward for initiative and success.

A goal of Correa's government Plan is:



Promover la construcción de una sociedad que profundice la calidad de la democracia y amplíe sus espacios de incidencia en condiciones de radical igualdad social y material.

Ello apunta al fortalecimiento de la sociedad -y no del mercado (como en el neoliberalismo) ni del Estado (como en el denominado 'socialismo real')- como eje orientador del desenvolvimiento de las otras instituciones sociales.

Two years ago, when he was fourth in polls, Rafael Correa asserted that if President, he would call to a referendum to convene to a national assembly:

"El mundo exige una democracia directa, no representativa".

In the case of Ecuador the answer is that political democracy does not relate to constitutional liberalism.