“For the Restoration of Democracy and National Unity”:
State Building and Ethnic Discourse in Ecuador's 1944-1945 Asamblea Constituyente

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Abstract:

Ecuador’s "Glorious May Revolution" of 1944 seemed to offer a promise of breaking down exclusionary barriers that prevented women, poor urban workers, peasants, and Indians from participating as equals in society. Led by a leftist coalition, a subsequent national assembly hammered out a progressive constitution which intended to codify many of the advances that popular movements were making through protests on the streets and in organizational meetings in convention halls. These advances seemed to promise to break down exclusionary barriers that prevented Indians from participating as equals in the process of state formation in Ecuador. Even as delegates debated extending citizenship rights to Indians and making Quichua an official language, conservative elite reactions threatened to roll back these advances. A year after finishing their work, populist president José María Velasco Ibarra abrogated the new constitution and re-entrenched an exclusionary system. Based on an examination of debates within the 1944-1945 constituent assembly and popular actions in the streets, this essay analyzes competing interests which divided sympathetic leftist and antagonistic conservative views on state formation, and the subalterns who were caught between the two.


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On May 28, 1944, a coalition of workers, Indians, peasants, students, and some military personnel joined forces in the “Glorious May Revolution” that overthrew the increasingly unpopular presidency of Carlos Arroy del Río. The military declined to come to the aid of the embattled government, refusing to use repression to defend the interests of the oligarchy. Some lower-level officers and soldiers even provided overt support to the revolutionary movement. After a brief period of euphoria which appeared to be ushering in a new period of social relations with optimistic expectations of increased popular participation in political power, the country’s elite reestablished their control. The lower classes were once again marginalized and excluded from political processes.

This is a familiar story which has repeated itself several times throughout Ecuador’s history. In fact, traditional political treatments tend to periodize the country’s history based on these types of popular uprisings, considering Eloy Alfaro’s 1895 Liberal Revolution, the 1925 Juliana Revolution, and the 1944 Glorious May Revolution to be the most significant watersheds which realigned social and economic forces in the country. The popular uprising of January 21, 2000, which forced president Jamil Mahaud from power probably would form the next step in this inevitable march of history.¹ There are strong parallels between these events. In each case, popular sectors were on the verge of redefining state power so that it would respond to their class interests but each time the elite managed to reassert their control over the country’s economic and political structures. Several factors account for this outcome. In each case, a mass subaltern movement entered into alliances with elite sectors which ultimately undermined their class and ethnic interests. The movement also was not able to mobilize the significant resources necessary

¹On January 21, 2000, Antonio Vargas, the president of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), joined a triumvirate which staged a coup d’état that ousted the president and briefly ruled the country. Under pressure from the United States, General Carlos Mendoza, a triumvirate member, dissolved the junta and handed power over to Gustavo Noboa, Mahuad’s vice president. Noboa promptly implemented the neoliberal economic reform measures which had resulted in Mahuad’s ouster in the first place. See Catherine Elton, "Ecuadorean Indians flex political biceps," Christian Science Monitor (January 24, 2000): 1, 7. Also see Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas (ICCI), “Noticias del Levantamiento Indígena y de la Sociedad Civil de Enero del 2000,” http://icci.nativeweb.org/levantamiento2000/, 2000.
to force desired legal and constitutional changes. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, collusion with the elite prevented the broadening of political participation and the extension of full and complete citizenship rights to historically excluded groups such as the urban poor, Indians, and women. Failure to achieve these rights resulted in frustrated attempts to gain a voice in state power and a continued marginalization for the country’s poor rural and urban peoples.

This essay analyzes the openings for popular organizing efforts which the May 1944 uprising created, and in particular focuses on the 1944-1945 constituent assembly which drafted the most progressive constitution in Ecuador’s history. Despite high expectations, the outcome in 1944 was the same as that of 1895, 1925, and 2000. Repeatedly, a powerful mass movement threatens to force fundamental changes in state structures only to collapse in the face of a conservative opposition. Eugen Weber has observed, “one thing that we learn from history is that people seldom learn from history.”2 This essay addresses why this has been a recurring problem for popular movements in Ecuador.

The Glorious May Revolution

The "Glorious May Revolution" represented a significant break in the political history of the Ecuadorian republic and brought to an end to the hegemony that liberals had enjoyed over the country since Eloy Alfaro’s 1895 Liberal Revolution. The 1944 revolution began at 10 p.m. on the evening of May 28 with the military garrison in the coastal port city of Guayaquil revolting against Carlos Arroyo del Río’s government. Until 7 a.m. the next morning, they attacked the cuartel de carabineros, Arroyo’s main base of support, finally burning it to the ground. The military, claiming “the support of all the people, principally students, workers, and intellectuals,” had rebelled “to put an end to the hateful tyranny of traitors whom we can no longer tolerate.” The military denied that it desired to take over the government. Rather, power “will be placed in the hands of civilians who will guarantee an immediate return to normality.”3

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3“Proclama de la Guarnición Militar de Guayaquil,” in Universidad de Guayaquil, Facultad de Ciencias Economicas, 28 de mayo de 1944: documentos ([Guayaquil]: Departamento de Publicaciones de la Facultad de Ciencias Economicas, 1983), 171. For detailed examinations of the May 1944 revolution, see Sergio Enrique Girón, La revolución de mayo (Quito: Editorial Atahualpa, 1945); Universidad de Guayaquil, El 28 de mayo de 1944: testimonio ([Guayaquil]: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984); and Silvia Vega Ugalde, La Gloriosa: de la revolución del 28 de mayo de 1944 a la contrarrevolución velasquista, Colección
Arroyo del Río had come to power in 1940 amongst charges of electoral fraud in a three-way race against the conservative archaeologist and historian Jacinto Jijón y Caamaño and the independent populist José María Velasco Ibarra. As Agustín Cueva has remarked, Arroyo’s win represented victory for “the most reactionary wing of the Liberal party.” The credibility of Arroyo’s government suffered after losing a war with Peru in 1941 and ceding half of Ecuador's territory in the subsequent Río Protocol. Given the option of defending national security or maintaining internal order, Arroyo del Río decided to preserve his political fortunes. Disillusioned with the increasingly dictatorial and anti-democratic nature of Arroyo del Río’s government, recognizing the inevitability of a fraudulent electoral process, and with their base of support in the poor urban and rural masses largely excluded from the exercise of the franchise through literacy requirements, leftist parties refused to participate in May 1941 elections for the national congress. As a result, voter participation, which slowly had been rising throughout the 1930s, dropped noticeably.

With increased repression and a rising cost of living, diverse political parties including the Conservative, Radical Liberal Independent, Socialist, Socialist Vanguard, Communist, Democratic National Front, and University Democratic Union joined forces in a coalition called the Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana (ADE, Ecuadorian Democratic Alliance) in July of 1943. In fact, the only party excluded from this broad coalition was Arroyo del Río’s official liberal party, and the desire to remove him from office unified all of his opponents. The ADE claimed to incorporate people from “all professions and religious faiths, all types of employment, all levels of wealth and culture, and all colors and races,” to struggle for freedom, national unity, and economic development. Under the slogan “for the restoration of democracy and national unity,” the Alliance defined itself as anti-fascist and for a “true democracy” based on free elections with a constitutionally guaranteed right to organize. Economic reforms included a pledge to modernize the economy, extend agricultural credit to peasants, establish a minimum wage, and regulate prices. The ADE also emphasized the importance of improving education (especially in rural areas, given that the country suffered from 95 percent illiteracy rates), developing the Ecuadorian...
military into a “democratic force, capable of defending national sovereignty” and “defending the continent against totalitarianism.” It also expressed a desire “to incorporate the Indian and montuvio into the national life.”

The ADE put forward Velasco Ibarra as its presidential candidate in elections planned for June 2 and 3 of 1944. Arroyo del Río refused to allow Velasco Ibarra, who had gone into exile in Chile after losing the 1940 elections, to return to Ecuador to campaign for the presidency. Convinced that the liberals would not respect the 1944 election any more than the one in 1940, the ADE organized the May 28 revolt with the support of workers, students, Indians, women, and lower sectors of the military. Popular uprisings in Guayaquil, which resulted in the deaths of several hundred people, spread the following morning to the highland towns of Quito, Cuenca, and Riobamba. With the elimination of Arroyo’s repressive police forces, students organized into Guardias Cívicas Urbanas patrolled the streets, but reported no problems. In Quito, protestors encircled governmental buildings paralyzing their operations. Street demonstrations congregated on the Plaza de la Independencia where people sang the national anthem, cheered Velasco Ibarra, and speakers made impassioned calls for social change. By the evening of the 29th about half of Quito’s population was in the streets in support of the uprising. Women’s committees played an important role in these protests, including helping organize a human enclosure around the Government Palace and gained the surrender of the men stationed there. In the northern highland town of Cayambe, long-time Indian rights leader Dolores Cacuango led Indigenous forces in an attack on the local army barracks. Ecuador, one author observed, finally “was in the hands of its legitimate owners.”

Having lost virtually all of his support, Arroyo del Río resigned from the presidency on May 31. The military leaders who participated in the uprising asserted that “we, the men of the people, captured the government, and we set up a popular regime, the most democratic in this

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6Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana (ADE), Los postulados de la Revolución de Mayo: programa de Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana (Quito: Talleres Gráficos Nacionales, 1944), 7-12.
8Raquel Rodas, Nosotras que del amor hicimos... (Quito: Raquel Rodas, 1992), 60.
They handed power to the ADE which established provisional ruling juntas in Guayaquil and Quito that would govern until Velasco Ibarra could return to the country. A wide variety of people served in these juntas, representing the ideological diversity of the ADE coalition. In Guayaquil, the Junta Provisional de Gobierno included Francisco Arízaga Luque (Liberal), Pedro Antonio Saad (Communist), Angel Felícísmo Rojas (Socialist), Alfonso Belisario Larrea Alba (Socialist Revolutionary Vanguard), and Efraín Camacho Santos (Conservative). In Quito, the Political Bureau of the ADE claimed control and included Julio Teodoro Salem (Liberal), Gustavo Becerra (Communist), Manuel Agustín Aguirre (Socialist), Camilo Ponce Enríquez (Ecuadorian Democratic Front), Mariano Suárez Veintimilla (Conservative), and General Luis Larrea Alba (Socialist Revolutionary Vanguard). The junta announced a six-point political program which included agricultural, industrial, labor, and other reforms.

On June 1, Julio Teodoro Salem, liberal leader of the ADE, proclaimed José María Velasco Ibarra as Supreme Chief of the Republic before the left could present an alternative candidate. Velasco Ibarra entered power with wide and diverse support which crossed all social classes, political persuasions, and sectors of society. Women, children, Indians and others “from all stations in life” met and gave Velasco Ibarra a very warm welcome as he slowly made his way to Quito from where he had been waiting in the wings in exile in Colombia on Ecuador’s northern border. Arriving in the capital, he pledged to struggle for social justice and a national transformation. This was a period of high expectations for deep changes. Leftists thought May 28 was the beginning of a Marxist revolution.

The next several months witnessed an explosion of popular organizing efforts as groups which had been prevented from gathering under Arroyo’s repressive government capitalized on this political opening to put forward their political agendas. Students, workers, women, peasants, agriculturalists, and others all held meetings during the months of June to August. In July, more than a thousand workers, artisans, peasants, intellectuals, and political leaders met in Quito to found the Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador (CTE, Confederation of Ecuadorian

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9Girón, 122.
11Vega Ugalde, 96; Girón, 355.
Workers). This was the first successful effort to establish a national leftist labor confederation and subsequently became a major force in popular organizing efforts in Ecuador. Socialist and communist party leaders as well as people from an anarcho-syndicalist political persuasion played a large role in defining its ideology which sought to "better workers' economic and social situation and defend their class interests." Their demands included better salaries, a shorter work week, a guaranteed right to strike, the elimination of feudal trappings in agriculture, defense of democracy, and other elements which favored the proletariat within the framework of an international working-class struggle.\textsuperscript{12}

A month later, Indigenous leaders with the support of the CTE labor federation and members of the socialist and communist parties gathered in Quito to form the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI, Ecuadorian Federation of Indians). The FEI was the first successful attempt in Ecuador to establish a national organization for and by Indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{13} The federation played an important role in fighting for the rights and interests of Ecuador's highland Indigenous population and improving conditions for Ecuador's peasant and Indian peoples. It struggled for higher salaries, a shorter work week, payment for women's work on the haciendas, and the end to the huasicama system which required personal service in landlords' houses. From the 1940s through the 1960s, the FEI flourished as the main national organizational expression of highland Indigenous and peasant groups, and it stands out as a milestone in the history of Ecuador's popular movements.

These organizations struggled to extend social security benefits to peasants and included as one of their founding principles a demand for agrarian reform. They called for land and water to be returned to Indigenous and peasant communities from which they had been snatched. It also called for the implementation of modern forms of cultivation, the formation of cooperatives, the creation of an effective system of credit which would benefit the peasants, the expansion of irrigation systems, and the improvement of living conditions for salaried agricultural workers.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12}Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador (CTE), "Estatutos de la Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador (C.T.E.)," in Osvaldo Albornoz, Vladímir Albornoz, César Endara and others, 28 de mayo y fundación de la C.T.E., Colección Popular 15 de Noviembre, No. 4 (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1984), 194-95.
\textsuperscript{13}Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios, Estatutos de la Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (Guayaquil: Editorial Claridad, 1945).
\textsuperscript{14}CTE, 195.
Over the next several decades, these organizations worked to develop a worker-peasant alliance to struggle for a democratic agrarian reform and a defense of workers and Indians in the face of state and employer violence.  

The 1944-1945 Constituent Assembly

On July 23, 1944, the Ecuadorian electorate (literate men and women, perhaps about 5 percent of the population) picked delegates for the constituent assembly which would draft a new constitution for the country. Notably absent from this assembly was the direct participation of Indians, women, and other members of marginalized sectors who had played leading roles in the Glorious May Revolution. All of the delegates who gathered in Quito to draft the constitution were men from Ecuador’s privileged elite white-mestizo class. Since the Indians legally were not citizens, the government denied them access to the national congress. A small but growing literate middle class brought more people into the electorate who were willing to vocalize these concerns, but elites continued to exclude the large rural Indian masses and urban poor from political discourse.

The leftist ADE coalition which led the May Revolution and was responsible for bringing Velasco Ibarra back into power, emerged victorious in the July election and held a dominant position in drafting the constitution. The 1930s had been a time of growing electoral strength for the left, and, together with their significant participation in the events of May, this was reflected in the composition of the assembly. Of the leftist parties grouped into the ADE coalition, communists won nine of the 98 seats and socialists held another 31 seats. In comparison the liberals held 29 seats and the conservatives 24. It was one of the left’s highest points of electoral strength in the country’s history. Communist leaders such as Enríque Gil Gilbert and Neptalí Pacheco León played active roles in the assembly and helped push through reforms that benefitted the rural and urban working classes. The extent of leftist influence in this assembly is reflected in a November resolution to send greetings to the Soviet Union on the anniversary of the 1917 revolution. Socialists intended to use this opportunity “to write a revolution” because a “revolution is not only the triumph of arms, but more than anything it is changing the fundamental

bases of the socio-economic organization” of state structures. This large and significant leftist presence resulted in one of the most progressive constitutions that Ecuador has ever enjoyed.

The assembly convened on August 10 (the anniversary of Ecuadorian independence from Spain), declared the 1906 constitution to be in effect, and named Velasco Ibarra president of the republic. In the inaugural session, Francisco Arízaga Luque, the president of the congress, stated that the new constitution needed to be simple, straightforward, and democratic. Delegates did not expect the congress to stay in session for more than two months, with the first month dedicated to approving a new constitution and the second month to addressing other important legal reforms. This was not to be the case, however, as highly contested issues such as citizenship rights and construction of state structures led to lengthy debates. In one of the longest constitutional deliberations in the country’s history, it took seven months to complete work on Ecuador’s fifteenth constitution which was formally promulgated on March 6, 1945.

The debates in the constitutional assembly began on a tone of congeniality and consensus. Independent delegate Carlos Zambrano noted that the May Revolution belonged to the Ecuadorian people, and not to the left or the right. Although noting that people participated in the May Revolution in order to address problems of unbearable poverty and misery and not to write constitutions, leftist delegates declared their dedication to national unity and harmony, and not to use the congress as a platform to organize a social revolution. Pedro Saad claimed that the communists “do not want to make a revolution of the extreme left, as people are saying on the street.” Calming reports in the newspaper El Día that the assembly was going to pass laws breaking up large estates, socialist delegate David Altamirano from Chimborazo noted that there was no cause for alarm because they would not promulgate any agrarian reform laws.
Ultimately the left’s desire not to alienate conservative colleagues in the ADE would mean limited reforms that would benefit marginalized sectors.

After completing several routine legislative tasks, the assembly got down to business on Monday, August 21, 1944 with the assigned task of writing a new constitution. The first item of discussion was defining the nature of the Ecuadorian State. Manuel Elicio Flor, a conservative representative from Pichincha and Second Vice-president of the Congress, opened the debate with a theoretical treatise on the nature on the state. For the next two days the assembled delegates debated the meanings of the Ecuadorian state, nation, sovereignty, and democracy. Socialist leader Manuel Agustín Aguirre responded to Flor’s comments by painting an alternative view of Ecuador’s history with the dominant class repeatedly and constantly using state structures as a tool to exploit people and resources. “To speak of a democratic state,” Aguirre argued, “we must first destruct *ladifundismo* and incorporate the Indigenous masses into the civilization. As long as feudalism persists, the constitutions will not be democratic.” He believed the duty of the congress was to accomplish what Eloy Alfaro’s 1895 Liberal Revolution failed to do—destroy the current semi-feudal state structures. Agustín Vera Loor, a communist delegate from the coastal province of Manabí, presented a similar analysis of state structures. He defined the current state as “feudal semi bourgeoisie” and noted that the struggle was to convert it into a “democratic and bourgeois state.” Vera Loor concluded the first day’s discussion with the observation that the communists were less interested in a revolution of ideas than a judicial and political transformation that would benefit the general public.20

Generally the delegates agreed that the Ecuadorian state was defined by its territory and people, but the meaning of Ecuadorian nationalism was much more contentious. Many of the delegates searched for a sense of a unified national identity in a shared history, language, religion, territory, culture and race. Manuel María Borrero, a liberal delegate from Cañar, pointed to the “racial duality” which divided whites and Indians as a barrier to the creation of a unified national identity which he perceived as essential for the development of the Ecuadorian state.21 Comments such as these reveal the limited knowledge and understanding of Indigenous communities and

20“La Asamblea Constituyente inició la discusión de la Carta Política,” *El Comercio* (Quito), August 22, 1944, 1; “Actas de la Asamblea Constituyente de 1944,” t. 1, 618f (August 21, 1944), APL
21“La Asamblea Constituyente inició la discusión de la Carta Política,” *El Comercio* (Quito), August 22, 1944, 11.
ethnic diversity in Ecuador which characterized the discussions in the Constitutional Assembly. Not only did such delegates collapse the extreme diversity of more than ten different Indigenous groups living within Ecuador’s territorial borders into one homogenous category of “Indian” and then proceed to equate that with the Quichua people living in the highlands, they largely ignored the sizeable Afro-Ecuadorian population, numbering perhaps 5 to 10 percent of the population. Furthermore, this search for a unified national identity submerged persistent and profound regional divisions between the coast, the northern and southern highlands, and the eastern Amazonia. In the oft-quoted words of Benedict Anderson, this is an overt example of nationalism as an “imagined community.”

One exception to this general trend was the communist leader Ricardo Paredes, the last delegate to be selected for the Constituent Assembly. On August 10 as the assembly was engaged in its opening formalities in the legislative palace, Indigenous leaders and their supporters gathered a few blocks away in the Teatro Sucre were putting the finishing touches on Ecuador’s first national Indigenous organization, the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI, Ecuadorian Federation of Indians). In their final meeting, they announced that they had selected Paredes as the functional representative for the Indigenous Race to defend their interests in the Constituent Assembly. For two decades Paredes had been deeply involved in organizing Indigenous communities, particularly in the canton of Cayambe north of Quito, and he had assumed a leading role in organizing the FEI. Because of his long involvement and deep commitment, he was highly regarded in Indigenous circles, and they intrusted him with presenting their demands to the national assembly. Paredes strove to meet these expectations as he actively lobbied for Indigenous concerns in the assembly. For example, he used his position to launch an investigation into abuses on the Tiocajas and Tigua haciendas in the central highland provinces of Chimborazo and Cotopaxi and to defend the demands of Indians on the San Vicente hacienda in Otavalo. Socialist delegate Emilio Uzcátegui greeted his contributions with the observation that this was “the first time that an authorized voice of a true and authentic representative of the Indigenous race has been raised in the Ecuadorian Congress.”

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22“El Dr. Francisco Arizaga Luque fue nombrado Presidente por 52 votos,” El Comercio (Quito), August 11, 1944, 3.
23“Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 3, 510 (September 23, 1944), APL. Also see "Asamblea Constituyente aprobó reforma al presupuesto fiscal," El Comercio (Quito), September 24, 1944, 15;
In a lengthy intervention during the discussions on concepts of state formation on the first days of the constitutional debates, Paredes noted that extreme regional and cultural differences as well as the lack of infrastructure which further isolated areas in which the subalterns lived prevented the formation of a unified national identity in Ecuador. At most, the delegates should talk of a national identity in formation. In one of the few times during the seven months of constitutional debates, he discussed the realities of the Afro-Ecuadorian population in Esmeraldas. Breaking from the concept of a unified Indian population that focused only on the highland region, he addressed the unique needs of different Indian groups spread throughout the Ecuadorian territory, particularly the Cayapas (Carchi) in the coastal province of Esmeraldas and forest Indians in the eastern Amazon basin. Foreshadowing arguments that Indigenous leaders would make decades later, Paredes maintained that it was a mistake to see Indians as racial or ethnic groups because their own history, language, territory, and cultural institutions in reality made them nationalities. He urged his fellow leftists not to see Indian poverty as a simple issue of class oppression, but rather a complicated issue that took into account their varying cultures and national characteristics.  

The Indian Problem

As indicated in the discussions on nationalism, the role of Indians in the body politic was a persistent and problematic theme of discussion during the constitutional debates. Rather than recognizing the value of Indigenous cultures and the presence of strength in diversity, elites viewed Indians as disrupting national unity and integration and holding back the country’s economic development. Both the assembly and the resulting constitution reflected the dominant
cultures’ views on the role of subalterns within state structures. In April 1944 in the midst of the aborted electoral campaign before the May Revolution, the ADE released a statement on the “Incorporation of the Indian and Montuvio into the National Life.” It identified as one of the fundamental problems facing Ecuador the massive Indian and montuvio peasant population existing on the edges of society. These rural subalterns, comprising 75 percent of the country’s population, were not citizens because they were illiterate. A larger problem, however, was the failure to assimilate these people into a western vision of the nation state. They needed to learn “to live like men, in houses and not in huts; sleeping in beds; eating real food; using tools that technologically would bring them into our century; benefitting from the advantages of medicine and hygiene; dressing like men of our time and culture.” They would need help “to extirpate definitively the negative physiological, spiritual, social, economic, and political characteristics that during centuries of oppression has settled into their personalities.”

Elite comments on the “Indian problem” reveal a deeply ironic philosophical conundrum. On one hand, the ADE expressed a desire to hear subaltern voices and help them achieve their goals. The ADE denounced those who treated the subaltern masses as passive subjects, instead proclaiming that Indians and montuvios should be active in “organizing their cooperative societies, agrarian leagues, communities, syndicates, and cultural groups” in order to state “with their own lips” their needs and demands. But on the other hand they had clear pre-existing notions of how to solve this “peasant problem” and that was through their assimilation into the elite’s normative mestizo society. The ADE’s paternalistic spirit toward the subalterns carried over into the writing of the 1945 constitution. There was no consideration of extending citizen rights to oral (i.e., “illiterate”) societies, or understanding or appreciating the strength and value of these societies. Rather, they would need to be transformed into something approximating western culture in order to be valued. Rather than recognizing and appreciating Ecuador’s multicultural society, the drafters of this constitutional ultimately favored the imposition of a unified hegemonic culture. To do otherwise would deviate from the slogan of the May Revolution: “For the restoration of democracy and national unity.”

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25ADE, 53-55.
26ADE, 53-54.
Paredes, the functional representative for the Indigenous Race, argued that the best way to solve these problems was through the establishment of a Ministry of Indigenous Affairs. “The Indigenous problem is one of the most arduous issues that the country faces,” Paredes noted, “with the situation of almost half of the Ecuadorian population living in a truly subhuman condition for the last five centuries.” Despite their good intentions, liberals had not been able to solve the problems that the Indians faced. Paredes blamed this on the failure of state structures to address Indigenous concerns, and argued that it would only be through a ministry dedicated exclusively to this issue that solutions could be implemented. The few efforts that had been undertaken focused almost exclusively on the highlands, but Paredes observed that the state’s failure to address Indigenous concerns became even more obvious when one considered those living in the eastern Amazonian basin. “We Ecuadorians must consider Indians as Ecuadorians,” he argued, “but we have done nothing to benefit Amazonian Indians.” The purpose of such a governmental ministry would be to study these problems and develop concrete solutions favoring the subaltern masses. “The creation of a Ministry of Indigenous Affairs would be the May Revolution’s greatest achievement,” Paredes urged. “If the May Revolution manages truly to incorporate Indians into the Ecuadorian population, giving them all the benefits of civilization, it would be the achievement of its highest aspirations and the most beautiful of its conquests.”

Paredes presented the strongest, clearest, and most articulate defense of Indigenous concerns in the congress. Although some of the delegates, including Gustavo Buendía of the Socialist Vanguard party, supported Paredes’ proposal, ultimately the assembly did not create such a ministry. Without the Indians being present, it was difficult for them to defend their own ethnic interests. It was largely through the efforts of sympathetic and dedicated advocates such as Ricardo Paredes who consistently pressed for universal citizenship and suffrage rights for women and illiterate peasants, Indians, and urban workers that the constitution included some of these concerns.

27“Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 3, 325-30 (September 21, 1944), APL. Also see Ricardo Paredes, “Acerca de la nacionalidad y el estado ecuatoriano,” in Los comunistas en la historia nacional, ed. Domingo Paredes (Guayaquil: Editorial Claridad, S.A., 1987), 74-80;” La Asamblea Nacional sesionará en Guayaquil el nueve de Octubre próximo,” El Comercio (Quito), September 22, 1944, 12; Vega Ugalde, 117; Cueva, 37; and Leonardo J. Muñoz, Testimonio de lucha: memorias sobre la historia del socialismo en el Ecuador (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1988), 86-88f.
Language

The role of language in the formation of state structures and national identity become a hotly debated topic in the constituent assembly. Delegates fought over the purpose of language and its practical and symbolic values. When on October 3 the assembly turned its attention to the fifth article of the constitution which was to define an official language, three proposals were brought forward. The first by Enríque Gil Gilbert, a communist delegate from Guayas, read:

Spanish is the national language and Quechua is recognized as a language for the instruction and use of the Indian population as one of the means to incorporate them into the nationality.

The Communist Party proposed:

Spanish is the official language. In the instruction and in the political and administrative affairs of Indian populations they will use Quechua and other aboriginal languages as a means to incorporate them into the nationality.

Finally, a constitutional commission submitted:

Spanish is the national language. The Quechua language is used for the instruction of Indian populations with the goal of inducing them to learn the Spanish language and by this means incorporate them into the Indo-Spanish civilization.

Despite the similar language of the proposals, the topic generated a lengthy debate over a variety of topics including whether Spanish should be an “official” or “national” language. Several delegates questioned why they were even including this article in the constitution. “Language is a natural sociological phenomenon,” Buendía remarked, “and it cannot be regulated.” Having the congress declare a language official made it no more so than declaring Tucán “tierra caliente” made it possible to grow sugar cane there.

Paredes in his role as the functional representative of the Indigenous race noted that everyone in the assembly agreed that Spanish was Ecuador’s official language, but the role and purpose of Quichua and other Indigenous languages engendered much more contentious debates.

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28 The debate is recorded in “Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 3, 978-1006 (October 3, 1944), APL. Also see "Otros tres artículos de la Constitución fueron aprobados ayer por la Asamblea,“ El Comercio (Quito), October 4, 1944, 5.

29 The debate is recorded in “Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 3, 999 (October 3, 1944), APL.
Several delegates noted that Quichua was not the only Indigenous language in Ecuador, but other such as Jibaro (Shuar), Zaparo (Zápara), and Cayapa (Chachi) were also important. Since the beginnings of European colonization, fluency in Spanish has been used as a marker of civilization. Indigenous languages were disparaged as inferior and a mark of backwardness. Daniel León Borja, conservative delegate from Chimborazo, argued that encouraging the study of Quichua would only result in the “deepening of existing ethnic and cultural conditions.” Indian children should be taught Spanish in the schools to help civilize them, and having only one official language would also strengthen Ecuadorian national identity. In the minds of the dominant culture, facility with European languages was equated with intelligence. Liberal delegate Eduardo Vásconez Cuvi argued that it would have been better had the Spanish taught their language to the Indians because if they had the Indians would have already been assimilated into white society. Conservative Rafael Terán Coronel, one of the few delegates in the assembly who spoke Quichua, pointed out, however, that the Inkas spoke Quechua and they were an advanced civilization. The racist underpinnings of many of the assumptions of the delegates were clear and hardly need comment.

Some of the strongest reactions against Indigenous rights including the use of language came from delegates representing hacendados and landholding interests. Carlos Zambrano, functional representative for Sierra Agricultural interests, stated that Quichua could hardly be considered an official language. He decried the efforts of José Carlos Mariátegui’s journal Amauta in neighboring Peru to cultivate the use of Quechua as a useless and snobbish undertaking that resulted in a fiasco. Reflecting common liberal assimilationist attitudes, he maintained that the Quichua Indian language should be used only as a vehicle to educate and incorporate Indians into a national culture. It does not matter, he concluded, that Quechua was an ancient language. What concerned him was human progress which could only be achieved through the incorporation of the Indian into western civilization. It was not only conservatives, however, who desired a
suppression of Indigenous languages. Leftists were perhaps even more adamant on this point because of their desire to bring material progress to marginalized communities, and in their minds holding to Indigenous cultures and languages would hinder this economic development.

Ricardo Paredes, the functional representative of the “Indigenous race,” was the most strenuous advocate of recognizing the value of Indigenous cultures and languages. He adamantly maintained that Indigenous languages were an immensely important part of their civilization and should be encouraged rather than suppressed. “A constitution should express the reality of a country,” he maintained. “The reality is that in this country about half of the people speak a language other than Spanish.” Logically it followed, according to Paredes, that these people should be allowed to use their own languages. He did not discourage the obligatory instruction of Spanish in the schools. Indeed, he considered it critical because speaking more languages meant a higher degree of culture and more economic opportunities. Encouraging the use of Quichua was not an “anti-Ecuadorian” position, but rather a patriotic stance that would “contribute to the grandeur of the country.”

After heated and lengthy debates, the constituent assembly finally yielded to some of Paredes’ arguments. “The Indians have their own native civilization,” Socialist Emilio Uzcátegui conceded, and the Communist Party was right not to remove them from their own civilization but to encourage their natural development which would benefit the entire country. Pedro Saad noted that the goal should be to assimilate Indians into the national culture, not to destroy their culture. When the delegates finally voted at the end of the long debate, Article Five read:

Spanish is the Republic’s official language. Quichua and other aboriginal languages are recognized as elements of the national culture.

For the first time the Ecuadorian constitution recognized the value of Indigenous languages. It was a small and perhaps largely symbolic victory, but it also revealed the subalterns’ growing strength. Increasingly, the elites acknowledged that state structures would have to be modified to take their presence and concerns under consideration.

32 “Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 3, 984-85, 992-94 (October 3, 1944), APL.
33 “Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 3, 1000, 1003 (October 3, 1944), APL.
34 Article 5 of the 1945 Constitution in 28 de mayo de 1944: documentos, 194.
Suffrage

Despite their exclusion, the role of Indians and women in the conceptualization of Ecuadorian citizenship became a common topic of debate in this constituent assembly, particularly as exhibited in its most public and political manifestation—the right to vote. As articulated in its founding “Programmatic Points” in 1943, the ADE embraced the principle of “broad electoral freedoms” as the only way to solve successfully the problems facing the country.\(^{35}\) The Alliance never defined, however, precisely just how broadly it wished to extend these rights and whether subalterns including illiterate Indians and poor urban workers legally excluded from citizenship should now be able to vote. Velasco Ibarra, of course, had his own ideas what “libertad de sufragio” meant, and this was ending the types of fraud and violence that deprived him of victory 1940, not bringing subalterns into the body politic.\(^{36}\) A range of views on suffrage led to a lengthy discussion in the constituent assembly. In the end, the elimination of electoral fraud was one of the few concrete accomplishments of the May Revolution, but that did little to benefit the subaltern masses.

The delegates gathered in Quito made a conscious distinction between nationality and citizenship. Several delegates reviewed the history of the exclusionary nature of citizenship in Ecuador. Dating from the time of independence, various constitutions had limited suffrage based on a person’s age, gender, wealth, and “cultural status,” which generally referred to a person’s ability to read and write. The history of citizenship in Ecuador reveals a gradual broadening of these rights, and debates within the Constituent Assembly reveal varying opinions on just how far open the political system should be. The issue of desirability or even possibility of universal suffrage caused deep disagreements between the members of different parties in the ADE, and indicated just how fragile the coalition was. In his opening discourse on the nature of the Ecuadorian state, conservative delegate Manuel Elicio Flor maintained that “pure universal suffrage does not exist” including because elections were influenced by money, ideas, class relations, and religion.\(^{37}\) Ezequiel Cárdenas Espinoza, a Conservative Party member from Cañar,

\(^{35}\)ADE, 16.
\(^{36}\)“Programa de Gobierno del Doctor Velasco Ibarra (Diciembre 19 de 1943), in 28 de mayo de 1944: documentos, 121.
\(^{37}\)”La Asamblea Constituyente inició la discusión de la Carta Política,” El Comercio (Quito), August 22, 1944, 11; “Actas de la Asamblea Constituyente de 1944,” t. 1, 618f (August 21, 1944), APL. By comparison,
denounced universal suffrage as an undesirable and unattainable utopia. Communist José María Roura representing Sierra University Students presented a class analysis of voting rights, noting that universal suffrage would be impossible as long as inequalities assure the presence of a dominant class that has the economic power to influence electoral outcomes.

In 1929, Ecuador was the first country in Latin America to give women the right to vote. In the public mind women, much like Indians, were associated with tradition and religion, and debates over the topic of giving them voting rights followed similar lines. Rather than opening up the body politic, this was seen as a way to “civilize” marginalized populations. Hence, giving women the vote was not based on a progressive impulse designed to advance women’s rights, but rather a conservative reaction intended to preempt a nascent feminist movement, prevent many women from entering the political arena and create a bulwark against what was perceived as a growing socialist threat in society. Similarly, the rhetoric of legal equality cloaked the reality of a racist situation in which the dominant culture viewed Indians as inherently inferior. Something that on the surface might appear to be a political opening was, in fact, an elite attempt to tighten their grip over society. Far from being considered an established and entrenched right in 1944, delegates debated whether women needed to be explicitly mentioned in the constitution, maintaining that “men” was a generic term that covered all people. By this standard, women and Indians had the right to vote in the nineteenth century, but this simply highlights the bankrupt nature of the liberal tradition that theoretically viewed all Ecuadorians as equal before the law, but in practice treated wealthy white males as more equal than others.

because of restrictions on the rights of immigrants, prisoners, children, and others, and the undo influence of money on the electoral process, universal suffrage also appears to be an unrealizable goal in the United States.

38Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 5, 3 (October 24, 1944), APL.

39“La Asamblea Nacional siguió estudiando la expedición de la nueva Carta Política,” El Comercio (Quito), September 6, 1944, 3.


41Socialist delegate Rafael Galarza Arizaga from Azuay made this argument. The delegates finally agreed to the wording “All Ecuadorians without regard to sex who are older than 18 years who know how to read and write are citizens,” Article 15 of the 1945 Constitution in 28 de mayo de 1944: documentos, 196. Also see “Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 5, 1-16 (October 24, 1944), APL; also see "Sobre los requisitos para ser ciudadano trató ayer la Asamblea Constituyente ," El Comercio (Quito), October 25, 1944, 3.
By 1944, gender and overt economic restrictions on voting had been removed, but most of the delegates wanted to incorporate the age and “cultural” restrictions. Few people would argue for giving minors the right to vote, and apparently most delegates still believed Indians were the equivalent of minors. Critical observers noted that denying the vote to illiterate Indians was a throwback to (or, perhaps more accurately, a continuation of) debates within the Catholic church after the European conquest as to whether the Indians could be considered human beings.\textsuperscript{42} To be sure, following a theoretically color-blind model descended from nineteenth-century liberalism the delegates did not directly target Indians with their legislation. In fact, in the opening presentation for the discussion on citizenship rights socialist Carlos Cueva Tamariz favored granting citizenship to “indo-americanos.”\textsuperscript{43} At the same time, however, Cueva Tamariz proposed limiting citizenship rights to those who could read and write, even though almost all Indians were illiterate. The Assembly gave little thought to extending citizenship rights to illiterates, and in fact delegates gave more serious consideration to granting this privilege to foreigners from other Spanish-speaking countries.\textsuperscript{44} Most delegates justified this position with the argument that uneducated people lacked the intellectual development to understand political issues and hence would make uniformed and potentially dangerous decisions at the voting table. A deep racism underlay these positions, as rural Ecuador is full of stories of officials using all sorts of mechanisms to deny access to literate Indians on election day. Literacy simply becomes a mechanism to prevent the subaltern masses from gaining power.

A similar argument had long been made to deprive women of suffrage rights, but the practice of women’s participation did not have as significant of an impact on the electoral landscape as many people had hoped or feared. In the Constituent Assembly, Manabí Communist delegate José Santos Rodríguez noted that women now had access to the vote because “modern judicial experiences has shown us that there is no reason to distinguish between them in the area of constitutional law.” He found it more difficult, however, to extend this same rational to

\textsuperscript{42}“El voto verbal para analfabetos,” Atahualpa (Quito, Boletín del Instituto Indigenista del Ecuador) 1:4 (January 1945), 3, reprinted from América Indígena, 4 (October 1944).

\textsuperscript{43}“Proyéctase otorgar la ciudadanía ecuatoriana a españoles e indoamericanos residentes en Ecuador,” El Comercio (Quito), September 5, 1944, 3.

\textsuperscript{44}“Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 5, 1-16 (October 24, 1944), APL; also see “Sobre los requisitos para ser ciudadano trató ayer la Asamblea Constituyente ,” El Comercio (Quito), October 25, 1944, 3.
illiterate subalterns “even though this will deprive a large percentage of Ecuadorians of the vote” who, despite their lack of formal education, “have a very high level of civic and patriotic consciousness and have demonstrated their ability to engage in political debates.” Even so, he believed it to be too dangerous to give subalterns the vote because the lack of working class organizations and the presence of feudalism in the countryside would mean that they would be unduly subject to the control of the bosses. If this were not the case, Santos Rodríguez concluded, “we would be in favor of giving the vote to all Ecuadorians without limitations.”

On the other extreme, Communist Party leader Ricardo Paredes insisted that not only more acculturated highland Indians but also isolated Indians in the eastern Amazonian rainforest must be included as part of the body politic. Fellow communist party leader Pedro Saad advocated granting illiterate people the vote in local municipal elections both to give them more power and as a way to give marginalized rural peoples valuable lessons in citizenship. Although coming from a party normally seen as sympathetic to Indigenous issues, Saad noted that they “would not dare give the vote to illiterates for higher level political elections.” Perhaps Saad assumed this position because coming from the Ecuadorian coastal city of Guayaquil he had less contact with Indians than did other party militants such as Ricardo Paredes who for decades had worked closely with highland Indigenous communities, but what is clear is that Saad’s comments reflect the common assimilationist attitudes of the dominant culture. The resulting 1945 constitution still failed to extend citizenship rights or the vote to the Indigenous peoples, although it continued to claim that the Ecuadorian government was “republican, elected, responsible.”

Delegates to this congress also raised the idea of limiting suffrage rights in ways that had not been attempted before in Ecuador. Some of the most lengthy debates revolved around the

45“Proyéctase otorgar la ciudadanía ecuatoriana a españoles e indoamericanos residentes en Ecuador,” El Comercio (Quito), September 5, 1944, 3.
46Ricardo Paredes in “Actas de la Asamblea Constituyente de 1944,” t. 3, 329 (September 21, 1944), APL. Unfortunately, Paredes was not present on October 24 when the assembly debated whether to extend citizenship rights to illiterate Indians and peasants and therefore did not influence the outcome of these discussions.
proposal from Eduardo Ludeña, socialist delegate from Loja, to exclude religious and military personnel from the right to vote. For example, Socialist representative Gustavo Buendía, reflecting liberal anti-clerical sentiments, argued that because clergy and soldiers function within disciplined command structures, they would not be able to exercise their free will while voting and hence should be denied that right. Miguel Angel Aguirre, socialist delegate from Loja, pointed out that such restrictions undermined the idea of universal suffrage. Guillermo Bustamante, functional representative for agriculture, argued that soldiers’ actions in the May Revolution revealed their ability to function independently and therefore should be trusted with the vote. Pressing for the broadest possible interpretation of suffrage rights, Communist José María Roura maintained that priests and soldiers should be allowed to vote, and instead place restrictions on the political involvement of the religious and military institutions. Coronel Carlos Pinto, functional representative for the Army, disagreed, arguing that corruption in the upper echelons of the military made giving soldiers the vote a dangerous move and their independence would be difficult if not impossible to ensure. Finally, it was decided that no restrictions would be placed on clergy and military personal.48

Functional Representation

Ultimately it was this tension between the desire for universal suffrage and a fear of unchecked influences on the political system which led the delegates to extend a system of functional representation in the constitution to guarantee congressional representation for minority interests (although Indians who comprised almost half of the country’s population in 1944 could hardly be properly termed a minority group). Since the 1929 constitution, special interest groups had been guaranteed representation in congress, and this provision carried over to the 1944-1945 constituent assembly. The 1929 electoral law stipulated that various national bodies would select fifteen “functional” senators to represent the interests of the university

48“Actas de la Asamblea Constituyente de 1944,” t. 2, 417f (September 5, 1944), APL; "La Asamblea Nacional siguió estudiando la expedición de la nueva Carta Política,” El Comercio (Quito), September 6, 1944, 3; "La Constituyente continuó tratando sobre el sufragio y sistema electoral,” El Comercio (Quito), September 8, 1944, 3, 11; "Varios artículos más de la Constitución fueron aprobados ayer por la Asamblea,” El Comercio (Quito), October 18, 1944, 3; "La Asamblea Nacional continuó el estudio de la Constitución Política,” El Comercio (Quito), October 27, 1944, 5.
teachers and students, secondary schools, primary schools, the press, agriculture, merchants, industry, workers, peasants, and the military. Finally, Article 92 of this law specified that the Council of State would elect a senator “for the guidance and defense of the Indian race.”

Whereas the other groups had the right to select their own representation, Indigenous peoples, who numbered about half of the population and thereby comprised by far the single largest group of those named in the law, had no such privilege. Indians and their sympathetic supporters fought for years with little success to gain control over this position. Rather than supporting Indigenous struggles, the politicians who filled this post were often antagonistic toward the very people they were to guide and defend.

This functional presence was expanded in the composition of the 1944-1945 constituent assembly in a democratic effort to increase representation for historically under-represented groups. While most of the delegates continued to represent one of the country’s 18 provinces, 35 (over a third) of the members served in the capacity of functional representatives, a notable increase over the previous constitution. In particular, representation for workers, the military, and education was expanded, reflecting the significant role that these sectors played in the events of May. While many of the functional delegates represented elite commercial and agricultural interests, ten served a variety of educational interests, eight represented workers, and one was delegated for Indigenous peoples. Socialists and communists held over half (18) of these seats, whereas the conservatives only held three (those for the Catholic workers and for private schools, which were also largely in Catholic hands). Functional representation gave the left a greater presence in the assembly than they may have otherwise enjoyed (see Appendix II).

During July and August of 1944, a variety of organizations gathered to select these delegates. At the end of the founding congress of the CTE, workers selected six delegates (four socialists and two communists) to represent their interests. These included Pedro Saad, the Secretary General of the Communist Party, and Manuel Agustín Aguirre, the Secretary General of

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50 This type of functional representation is not a historical anomaly in Latin America. After their 1979 victory in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas similarly granted a variety of special interest groups automatic representation in their governing Council of State. See John A. Booth, The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution, 2d ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 191.
the Socialist Party who was later also elected as the first vice-president of the Constituent Assembly. The CTE named Nela Martínez, a communist militant, founder of the Alianza Feminina Ecuatoriana (AFE, Ecuadorian Feminist Alliance), and active participant in the CTE congress, as an alternate delegate to the Constituent Assembly. She became the first woman to play a role in Ecuador’s national assembly. Although the AFE met on July 29 to select a new board for the organization and subsequently disseminated a document detailing societal changes they wished to see in the country, women were denied functional representation in the Constituent Assembly. Finally, as noted above, the FEI named Ricardo Paredes to the congress as the representative of the “Indigenous race.”

Delegates at the Constituent Assembly decided to retain this system of functional representation, but there was strenuous and contentious debate about how to divide up these positions. For example, six delegates were assigned to represent the interests of workers, but there was disagreement between the Catholic-based CEDOC and the leftist CTE unions as to who should control these positions. Similarly debates raged over representation of agricultural interests in the country. Two delegates were assigned to the landowners, but they resisted giving agricultural workers an equal level of representation. Conservatives argued that giving Indians representation would lead to a bloated congressional body that would make it difficult to accomplish legislative tasks, and that they would be an antagonistic presence in the respectable body. Furthermore, the workers’ delegates could represent their interests. This, however, did not prevent conservatives from arguing that since “agriculture was the principal source of wealth” in the country that the landlords’ representation should be raised from two to six delegates. Even though agricultural workers numbered more than half of the Ecuadorian population, the assembly consented to name a representative for Indigenous organizations in the highlands and another one for peasant syndicates on the coast. The comprises finally worked out in Article 23 of the

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constitution finally allowed for 25 functional representatives, including three for the agriculturalists, four for the workers, two for the peasants, and one for Indian organizations.  

Unlike the 1929 electoral law which gave the Council of State the right to select the representative of the Indigenous race, in the 1945 constitution this office lay with Indigenous organizations giving Indians significantly more control over their representative. Article 161 of the 1945 electoral law stipulates that the president of the Cantonal Electoral Tribunal would assemble the leaders of legally recognized Indian communities (comunas) and similar associations which had operated for at least a year. These meetings would select delegates which would then elect a deputy to the national congress. An inherent limitation of this system was that the comuna structure often functioned to undermine popular organizing strategies and many of the more politicized Indigenous communities rejected these structures. The true representation of Indigenous concerns was thus limited, and the Ecuadorian Federation of Indians (FEI) fought without success to claim for itself the right, as they had done in the 1944-1945 Constituent Assembly, to name this person.

This minor victory, including removing the paternalistic language of guiding and defending the Indian race, was largely due to Paredes’ strenuous and articulate defense of Indigenous rights. “There are class problems and there are nationality problems,” Paredes began his argument for Indigenous representation in the national assembly. “The Indigenous problem is not a simple thing” because “Indians belong to many social categories.” In addition to being agricultural workers in the countryside, they are also workers, street sweepers, peons, brick lawyers, etc. in the city. Furthermore, Indians faced unique certain characteristics including racial discrimination and feudal-style relations on haciendas from which white and mestizo agricultural workers were largely exempt. “An Indian is depreciated for being an Indian,” and also had “specific national characteristics.” Because of the economic and social oppression they faced, “the Indigenous

53a Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 6, 380f (November 21, 1944), APL; “La Asamblea en sesion matinal discutio la Constitucion Politica del Estado,” El Comercio (Quito), November 22, 1944, 2; “La Asamblea continuó el estudio articulado de la Constitución Política,” El Comercio (Quito), December 6, 1944, 9; Article 23 of the 1945 Constitution in 28 de mayo de 1944: documentos, 198-99.

54 Article 23 of the 1945 Constitution in 28 de mayo de 1944: documentos, 198-99; TSE, 210. Pedro Saad was one of those who fought to expand these rights for Indians. See “Actas de la Asamblea Constituyente de 1944,” t. 1, 868 (August 24, 1944), APL.

55 FEI, 10.
problem is the deepest and most terrible problem facing the country.” In Paredes’ mind, all of these factors defined the unique characteristics facing Indians and justified giving them their own representation in the national assembly. Furthermore, he looked forward to the day when people like him would not have to represent Indigenous interests in legislative assemblies, but they would be allowed to represent themselves.56

The 1945 constitution contained extensive checks against executive power and ensured permanent leftist representation in the government, provisions which led political scientist George Blanksten to declare the document to be utopian, unworkable, and “divorced from reality.”57 Others termed it “the most perfect and advanced” of the various constitutions which had governed Ecuador, and glorified its emphasis on equality and championing of the Quichua language and women’s rights.58 This constitution extended legal guarantees defending freedom of assembly and political organizations, while at the same time restricting military and religious participation in political activities. It declared the state educational system to be free, secular, and dedicated to eliminating illiteracy.

Aftermath

In overthrowing Arroyo del Río, according to Agustín Cueva, all Ecuadorians, “the red with the conservative, the priest with the soldier, the woman and the man, the student and worker” could momentarily unify forces to make the Glorious May Revolution.59 But it became impossible to solidify these diverse forces into a common front to transform the country after the ouster of the former president. Many of the apparent gains of the May 1944 "Revolution" were limited and short lived. Accompanying a rise in literacy rates only about 10 percent of the population now participated in elections. But this uprising failed to result in any profound or long-lasting changes. It did not redefine citizenship to include Indians, peasants, or the urban

56 "Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 6, 435-38 (November 21, 1944), APL.
poor. Although women and Indians had played a significant role in this political transformation, after the victory they were soon forgotten, marginalized, and excluded from participation in governmental affairs. Meanwhile, the economic situation in the country continued to decline. From 1943 to 1947 the cost of living in Ecuador more than doubled (see Appendix I). The change in government did not create a fundamental or conceptual shift that would address the underlying structural problems that gave rise to reoccurring problems which continued to haunt the country in January of 2000. Rather than solving the country’s problems, the new government only proved to exacerbate a worsening situation.

Although at that point in Ecuador’s history 70 percent of the population embraced leftist sympathies, leftist leaders, perhaps because of a lack of vision, political experience, sophistication, and the vanities of its leaders, had allowed liberals and conservatives to gain control of the Assembly. This led one participant to describe the left as “poor in political experience, but rich in idealism and naivety.” Despite the constitution’s progressive nature, the left’s weaknesses limited its effectiveness. Silvia Vega Ugalde later characterized the magna carta in terms of property, labor, and social welfare as “tepidly reformist.” It defended private property, outlawed expropriations, and retained the latifundio as the basis of the country’s agricultural economic development. Although it incorporated elements of the 1938 labor code into the constitution, including outlawing child labor and preserving the right to strike, it failed to establish a minimum wage. In retrospect, this was yet another lost opportunity for popular forces to challenge the fundamental assumptions underlying the social and economic organization of Ecuador’s state structures.

Velasco Ibarra, who never embraced socialist ideals, saw this victory as his own personal triumph, and his honeymoon with popular forces soon ended. Whatever his political views before May of 1944, he clearly was moving to the right after the Glorious Revolution. Most of the people he named to his cabinet were from the more conservative wings of the ADE. The two exceptions were Socialist Alfonso Calderón Moreno who served as Minister of Social Welfare and communist Alfredo Vera as Minister of Education, but even before the new constitution was finished Velasco Ibarra had forced both of these leftists out. Barely a month into the constituent

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60 Alfredo Vera, “Una insurrección triunfante que no pudo ser Revolución,” in El 28 de mayo de 1944: testimonio, 105-106; Plutarco Naranjo, “Pedí la renuncia a Velasco Ibarra,” in ibid., 267; Vega Ugalde, 118-19.
assembly, a delegate declared that even though Velasco Ibarra “came to serve the Ecuadorian people who put him in power, he has not been able to free himself from landholder and reactionary influences.” Velasco Ibarra found the 1945 constitution too radical, and later he criticized it for being “barbaric, absurd, utopian, and impossible, a typical example of the idiotic criollo Communism that congratulates itself for filling theaters and lecture halls with illiterate Indians.” Even before the constituent assembly was done with its work, Velasco Ibarra vocally expressed his opposition to the direction that the drafting of the constitution was taking. He opposed the system of functional representation and restrictions on executive power as limiting “the sovereignty of the people.”

These divisions in the chambers of the constituent assembly were also played out in street battles. In January 1945, leftist and conservative velasquist forces clashed on the streets in Quito and Guayaquil, injuring several people including communist delegates Pedro Saad and José María Roura. Throughout the highlands Indigenous communities protested for better wages and land, the May Revolution having raised their expectations for a better life. In Chimborazo, police killed one person and injured several more when they attempted to arrest Feliciano Pilamunga and Toribio Chacaguaza who they accused of leading an Indigenous uprising. In Cayambe, the government mobilized two army units, thirteen tanks, and two planes to Cayambe under the pretext of suppressing an alleged Indigenous uprising. Showing his true colors, Velasco Ibarra sided with the wealthy landholding class, blamed outside agitators for these uprisings, and told the Indians to quit causing trouble and to go back to work. The Glorious May Revolution appeared not to have solved any of the country’s problems.

Within the space of two years most of the socialists and communists left the government as Velasco Ibarra turned his back on his previous supporters, repressed labor movements, began

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61See Communist Gustavo Becerra comments in “Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 3, 511 (September 23, 1944), APL.
63Linke, 49.
64Versión oficial de levantamiento de los indígenas en el anejo Sanguicel," El Comercio (Quito), January 13, 1945, 1; "Constamannifestaciones rechazaron a los agitadores extremistas," El Comercio (Quito), January 17, 1945, 10; "Prodújose levantamiento de indígenas de cantón Cayambe contra la autoridad," El Comercio (Quito), January 30, 1945, 1, 2; Vega Ugalde, 117; Cueva, Process of Political Domination, 37; Muñoz, Testimonio, 86-88f.
to persecute "bolsheviks" and "terrorists," and for the first time in its history forced the Communist Party underground. He shut down the socialist newspaper *La Tierra* which was leading the opposition to his new dictatorial government, and sent its editors and workers to the García Moreno prison. Velasco Ibarra proceeded to build another prison on Isla Isabela in the Galápagos archipelago far off the Ecuadorian coast where he exiled his most bitter political enemies. Despite his populist rhetoric, Velasco Ibarra remained clearly and deliberately allied with the conservative oligarchy. His reforms never fundamentally altered political and economic relations in Ecuador.

In retrospect, many participants in the events of 1944 noted the conservative outcome of the events. Military leader Coronel Sergio Enrique Jirón called the revolution “stillborn.” Others called it a “revolution betrayed.” The communist Minister of Education Alfredo Vera noted that Velasco Ibarra was never committed to the revolution, but only wanted to restore democracy in order to preserve the oligarchy. Social delegate and vice-president of the Constituent Assembly Manuel Agustín Aguirre noted that his first meeting with Velasco Ibarra left him feeling totally disillusioned, not only because of the leader’s cold and distant personality but also because of his conservative and opportunistic political stance which could only mean limited political outcomes.65

A certain amount of political intrigue surrounded Velasco Ibarra’s rise to power in the name of leftists whom he would later persecute. Socialist leader Manuel Agustín Aguirre placed the blame for this development squarely at the feet of the Communist Party. Because of conservative opposition, the PCE had been the last ones to join the ADE but they were also among the most enthusiastic supporters of Velasco Ibarra. In 1943, the PCE declared that El Gran Ausente was the only person capable of carrying forward the ADEs program of liberating the toiling masses. By all rights, according to Aguirre, the ADE’s presidential nomination belonged to liberal Francisco Arízaga Luque, the founder of the Alliance. Because of petty

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rivalries and political intrigue, the PCE forced the candidacy to go to Velasco Ibarra which resulted in an opening to the right and a closing of the possibilities of agrarian and other reforms.\textsuperscript{66}

On March 30, 1946, Velasco Ibarra absolved the Constituent Assembly which had been elected in July 1944 and was to remain in power until August of 1946, declared himself dictator, abrogated the progressive 1945 constitution (which had been in effect only a little more than a year) and reinstated the 1906 constitution. This represented a definitive break between his government and popular forces. In August of 1946, Velasco Ibarra convened a constitutional assembly with the task of writing a new magna carte more to his liking. Leftists refused to participate in this affair, favoring instead to adhere to the constitution which they had implemented the previous year. The result was that the conservatives held the upper hand in writing a document which would govern the country for the next twenty years. Critics denounced it for rolling back the democratic advances embodied in the previous constitution.\textsuperscript{67} This new constitution provided a legal basis for the continuation of the \textit{latifundio} as the primary mode of agricultural production. The limited functional representation which workers, Indians and peasants enjoyed in the 1929 and 1945 constitutions was struck from this constitution. It also failed to acknowledge the importance of ethnicity, removing the reference from the previous constitution to Quichua and other Indigenous languages. This indicates the determined effort on the part of the conservative elite who drafted the new constitution to exclude from political discourse those whom they felt were unworthy of this activity. There was little effort to meet the general demands which the Indians and peasants had been pressing with the national government.

Velasco Ibarra promulgated the new constitution on December 31, 1946, but he did not remain in power long to enjoy its advantages. Velasco Ibarra’s conservative populism alienated both the left and right. With charges of economic mismanagement, on August 23, 1947 the military arrested Velasco Ibarra, forced him to resign, and expelled him from the country. Unlike the popular acclaim which had placed him in power in May of 1944, few people now came to his defense. An extraordinary session of congress named Carlos Julio Arosemena Tola to serve the

\textsuperscript{66}“Manifiesto a la Nación del Partido Comunista Ecuatoriano,” in 28 de mayo de 1944: documentos, 84; Manuel Agustín Aguirre, “Breves memorias sobre la Recolución del 28 de Mayo de 1944,” in 28 de mayo de 1944: testimonio, 218-21. Communist Alfredo Vera presents a similar view of these events. See "Una insurrección triunfante que no pudo ser Revolución," in ibid., 104.

\textsuperscript{67}Bossano, 181.
final year of Velasco Ibarra’s term, and this ushered in a 12-year period of unusual economic growth and political stability. Velasco Ibarra’s second period in office, much like the other four times he was the chief executive, resulted in a re-entrenchment of the exclusionary nature of Ecuadorian politics and a denial of a voice to the Indigenous peoples and popular movements in general.

Conclusions

José María Velasco Ibarra once observed that “Ecuador is a very difficult country to govern.” Ecuador has also been known as a country with highly unstable governments and frequent changes in chief executives and ministerial posts. Only during three periods throughout its history (1912-1924, 1948-1960, and 1979-1996) has Ecuador experienced a series of peaceful, legal, and constitutional changes of government. The switch in the 1950s from one of Latin America’s most volatile to one of the most stable political systems led many political observers to conclude that the country finally “had achieved a degree of political ‘maturity.’” Two periods of military rule in the 1960s and 1970s and the events of the last several years, however, cast doubt on this interpretation. A growing export economy in the late 1940s, particularly in a rising international demand for bananas, led to a reduction of tensions among the elite. In this more relaxed political atmosphere, the elites felt less of a need to contest for political power. This led to an appearance of political stability. When the economic situation worsened their grip tightened, political and economic participation became more exclusionary, and instability returned.

Instability is not an inherent component of Ecuadorian culture but an artificially created characteristic of a small elite determined to run the country according to its own interests to the exclusion of the rest of the populous. Regional and economic divisions within the elite class further led to political breakdowns. Although constitutional reforms after the 1944 revolution and the 1979 return to civilian rule opened up the political process, electoral politics continued to remain overwhelmingly a minority and elitist affair. The masses could only make their political presence known by engaging in extra-constitutional actions. This pressure for fundamental

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68Blanksten, vi.
structural reforms became much more apparent and urgent during times of economic crisis. Instability was a function of society’s inability to provide for all of its inhabitants.

Several lessons can be learned from the repeated failure of popular movements to capitalize on social upheavals such as those emerging out of the May 1944 Revolution. First, as in 1938 when the left snatched electoral defeat from the jaws of victory, rather than consolidating their hold on power the popular movements in 1944 once again entered into alliances with moderate forces which quickly betrayed their interests. Socialist intellectual Manuel Agustín Aguirre blamed the failure on the left’s tactics and strategies, including engaging in a popular front strategy. He asked whether a bourgeois or a proletariat revolution would bring the needed changes to Ecuador, concluding that building such popular fronts with the bourgeoisie would hinder a democratic revolution, and in fact the bourgeoisie played a counterrevolutionary and reactionary role in Ecuadorian politics. In the events of May 1944, “the bourgeoisie demonstrated yet again its counter-revolutionary character and inability to carry forward any democratic-bourgeois revolutionary tasks given its ties to landlords and capitalist imperialism.” Only a proletarian revolution, Aguirre concluded, could achieve the necessary revolutionary changes.70 Years later, René Maugé, the Secretary General of the Communist Party, lamented the strategic error of allowing Velasco Ibarra to coopt the masses after the May Revolution.71 Even outside observers noted that after struggling so hard for victory, it was a mistake for the left to trust their fortunes to a populist leader such as Velasco Ibarra.72 This seems to be a lesson that popular organizations painfully have still not been able to learn. In the 1990s, members of popular movements continued to place their hopes and aspirations in the hands of populist leaders such as Abdalá Bucaram who would immediately turn their backs on their supporters once they were in office. Repeatedly, workers, Indians and other subalterns placed their political hopes in the hands of opportunistic populist leaders who manipulated Indians to gain power but then once in office implemented policies which ran directly counter to their economic interests.

70Manuel Agustín Aguirre, Marx ante América Latina: Homenaje a Carlos Marx por el centenario de su muerte (Quito: Instituto de Investigaciones Economicas, Universidad Central, 1985), 116; Manuel Agustín Aguirre, “Breves memorias sobre la Revolución del 28 de Mayo de 1944,” in El 28 de mayo de 1944 : testimonio, 234.


72Blanksten, 69.
Although Ecuador’s popular movement has historically been very strong and well organized, it has never been able to assemble all the necessary resources to realize its goals. In *The Rights Revolution*, Charles Epp noted the necessity of mobilizing significant material resources to command changes in constitutional law, which has normally left these concerns under the domain of powerful business interests to the exclusion of ordinary individuals. It is only through the ability of popular organizations to mobilize their communal resources that concepts of democracy and citizenship can be expanded, and a more just and egalitarian society can emerge. Achieving the unity necessary to mobilize all of the necessary resources to realize these changes was a significant stumbling block in 1944 for the popular movement, and continues to be one today.

The collusion of leaders of popular movements with elite interests led to a final factor that prevented victory for the masses. Although Indians, women, workers, and others who participated in the coalition that overthrew Arroyo del Río in 1944 had their own organizations and were able to articulate their own demands, until they gained full citizenship rights they could not use formal political channels to press for the legal and structural changes such as raising the level of minimum salaries and enacting a program of agrarian reform. They faced the forerunner of what O'Donnell would later term a “low-intensity citizenship” in which a notable gap continued to exist between the liberal principle of equality and the practice of political exclusion. This was a form of a polyarchic democracy in which a small group of competing elites manipulated decision-making processes in order to maintain their control over the system. Self interest often prevented leaders from making the sacrifices necessary to demand complete and universal participation of all sectors in society on an even basis in decision-making processes. This political context led to a situation of partial democracy which continued to exclude the majority of the people from the full exercise of their citizenship rights. Until the popular movement found a way to achieve this goal, their vision for social changes would not be realized.

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A variety of leftists who were acutely aware of this lack of democracy and citizenship rights stepped into this vacuum and fought for the rights and interests of the workers, women, and Indigenous peoples, including political and electoral rights.\(^{76}\) While these subalterns worked from the outside, sympathetic leftists struggled from within the system to create political spaces for the dispossessed. As Foweraker and Landman noted, labor movements became “the vanguard of the citizenship struggle.”\(^{77}\) Only through popular mobilizations would it be possible “to close the gap between the rhetoric and reality of citizenship, between the promise and the practice of democratic rights.”\(^{78}\) Without a doubt, citizenship has always been highly exclusionary in Ecuador, and political openings have come only as a result of fierce popular struggles. It was this pressure from below which defined the nature of Indian politics and citizenship rights in Ecuador. Only through successfully building broad alliances with sectors of society that are deeply committed to the project of including the disenfranchised masses on an equal level with access to the resources necessary to press for profound political and economic changes will the popular movement alter state structures in ways necessary to achieve its goals.

\(^{76}\)Pedro Saad, "Sobre la alianza obrero campesina," *Bandera Roja* (Guayaquil) 1:3 (May-December 1961): 38.


## Appendix II
### Members of the 1944-1945 Constituent Assembly

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Provincial Representatives</th>
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<th>Party</th>
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<td>Octavio Chacón Moscoso</td>
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<td>Alfredo Chiriboga Ch.</td>
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<td>Daniel León Borja</td>
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<tr>
<td>Francisco Arízaga Luque</td>
<td>Guayas; President of the Congress</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
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Luis Ernesto Monge Imbabura Liberal
Alberto Moreno Andrade Imbabura Conservative
Luis F. Madera Imbabura Conservative
José B. Flores Imbabura Conservative
Guillermo Baquerizo Jiménez Los Ríos Socialist
Marco Tulio Guerra Los Ríos Socialist
Manuel Medina Castro Los Ríos Socialist
Eduardo Ludeña Loja Socialist
Miguel Angel Aguirre S. Loja Socialist
Ernesto Rodríguez W. Loja Socialist
Víctor Antonio Castilo Loja Conservative
Aquiles Valencia Aguirre Manabí Socialist
Agustín Vera Loor Manabí Communist
Sergio Plaza Acosta Manabí Socialist
Armando Espinel Mendoza Manabí Liberal
José Santos Rodríguez Manabí Communist
José María Plaza Lasso Pichincha Liberal
Alfonso Zambrano Pichincha Socialist (Frente Democrático)
Gustavo Buendía Pichincha Socialist (PVRS)
Manuel Elicio Flor T. Pichincha; Second Vicepresident of the Congress Conservative
Juan Isaac Lovato Pichincha Socialist (PSE)
Héctor Vásconez Tungurahua Liberal
Nicolás Dueñas Ibarra Tungurahua Liberal
Alfredo Coloma Tungurahua Liberal
José Javier Villagómez Tunhrahua Liberal
Nicolas Kingman Riofrío Napo Pastaza Socialist
Comandante Joaquín Samaniego Napo Pastaza Independent
Gonzalo Pesántevez Lafevre Santiago Zamora Conservative
Mayor Cornelio Izquierdo A. Galápagos Liberal

**Functional Representatives**
Luis A. Avilés Robinsón Coastal Agriculture Liberal
Marcos A. Espinel Mendoza Coastal Agriculture Liberal
Atanasio Santos Chávez Coastal Agriculture Liberal
Jaime Chávez Ramírez Sierra Agriculture Liberal
Carlos Zambrano O. Sierra Agriculture Independent
Modesto Larrea Jijón Sierra Agriculture Liberal
Abel Romeo Castillo Coastal Industry Socialist
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<td>Pedro Saad</td>
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**Political Parties**

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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Note: I was also unable to confirm which socialists were members of the PSE and which were members of the PVRS, which probably has resulted in an over counting of the previous and an undercounting of the later.