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**Department of Social and Educational Science**

**Course: Senior Study – POL 499 H**

**Ecuador: The Reasons behind the Decrease in Military**

**Coups and Government**

by

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### **Abstract**

Latin America has an extended history of military coups and governments among its countries, such as Argentina in 1976, Ecuador in 2000, Guatemala in 1956, and many more. The patterns of intermittent military coups have been a constant for a long period in Latin America, for it was depicted as a standard component of the political process. These recurring patterns have created a milestone in the political, economic, and social affairs of Latin American countries. The purpose of military coups was to enhance stability, defend the military interest by increasing the military budget, and expand the economy. Nonetheless, these patterns have significantly decreased when many Latin American states shifted to democracy substituting military-dominated governments with elected civilian officials.

Analyzing and understanding the declension of these continuous patterns is significant since it has altered the political systems in many Latin American countries as well as partially detached Latin America from the military control of major giants such as the United States. Taking Ecuador as evidence, this paper considers social movements, military policies, and foreign intervention as necessary elements that led to the control and suppression of the military.

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## Acronyms

MAP – Military Assistance Program

US – United States

GDP – Gross Domestic product

CONAIE - Confederación de Nacionalidades Indigenas del Ecuador or Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador

FENOCIN - National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black organizations

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or Soviet Union

OAS – Organization of American States

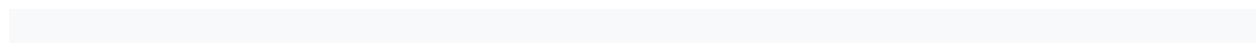
USAID – United States Agency for International Development

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

IIDH – CAPEL – Inter-American Institute for Human Rights

NED – National Endowment for Democracy

MI – Putnam's Military Intervention Index



## Introduction

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, military coups were considered the norm in Latin America paving the way for economic, social, and political instability to spread across the region. Evidently, thirty years after World War II, most republics in Latin America have fallen victims to at least one military coup.<sup>1</sup> Delving deeper, in the period of sixty years, twenty Central American countries have suffered from a total of 105 military coups.<sup>2</sup> In some states, such as Uruguay and Chile, the military enjoyed executive power; while others, including Ecuador and Brazil, had the means to control the military ensuring their return to barracks.

Since the third wave of democracy in the late 1980s, military governments and coups have drastically declined in some Latin American countries. In this context, the term “back to the barracks” refers to the fact that the democratic process, focusing on elections, has become the legitimate way to gain and maintain political power in many Latin American countries as well as it indicates the absence of authoritarianism.<sup>3</sup>

As it is challenging to analyze all Latin American countries, this study will focus on Ecuador as it is one of the countries having the highest number of military coups which amount to a total of thirteen coups. Similar to most Latin American countries, Ecuador is a state where poverty, famine, weak civilian power, and social uncertainty have pushed for the domination of the military when it comes to the political milieu. Research indicates that the last military coup happened twenty-three years ago where the Ecuadorian Head of State, Jamil Mahuad, was exiled.<sup>4</sup>

It is of utmost importance to focus on Ecuador when analyzing the decrease in military coups in Latin America since Ecuador can be considered a template to other countries in this region. Generally,

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<sup>1</sup> Huntington (1968) and Fossum (1967)

<sup>2</sup> Fossum, Egil. "Factors influencing the occurrence of military coups d'état in Latin America." *Journal of Peace Research* 4, no. 3 (1967): 228-251.

<sup>3</sup> Hakim P. Dispirited politics. *J Democr.* 2003;14(2):108–22. April.

<sup>4</sup> Dix, Robert H. "Military coups and military rule in Latin America." *Armed Forces & Society* 20, no. 3 (1994): 439-456.

Ecuador has suffered from political instability and economic deterioration which encouraged the military to take over the political arena. The latter was considered the situation of almost every Latin American state during post-cold war. Secondly, in Ecuador such as Haiti, Cuba and Venezuela and more, the basis of political, economic, or social change are indigenous people as they are depicted as a very powerful component of change. Lastly, Ecuador has implemented various military policies to exercise control over the military. For instance, Latin American social movements have proven to be the most successful and highly concentrated in this region. To summarize, most of the factors are present in Ecuador where it was easier to analyze the factors that led to the decline of military coups instead of evaluating every state alone.

This senior study will analyze the causes that led to the sudden decrease in military coups from thirteen to one in Ecuador, emphasizing on the reforms taken to promote change. This topic is of utmost importance since scholars have shown too little interest when it comes to Latin American states. Additionally, it focuses on the significance of international and domestic factors in disrupting the continuous pattern of coup d'états.

### ***Research Question and Hypothesis***

This research paper will tend to answer the subsequent research question: why military coups declined in Ecuador from 2000 till 2023?

This research paper aims to provide an answer for these questions since they are vital in understanding the different reasons that led the Ecuadorian population to limit the power and influence of the military. Additionally, it is important to take into account events that took place in the 2000s that led to this significant decrease where only one attempt occurred in the last twenty-three years.



Evidently, scholars have provided many possible factors explaining the decrease in the high number of coups in Ecuador; however, this study will focus on the core ones that differ from other Latin American states.

This paper will try to confirm the following hypothesis: the strong social movement in Ecuador along with the implementation of military policies and the intervention of the United States are all reasons that led to the decrease in military coups.

The period that will be emphasized in this study is from 2000 till 2023. Briefly, 2000 is a vital year to consider as it marks the emergence of events that led to the return of the military to the barracks. In addition, the year 2007 till 2017 will gain major attention since Ecuador witnessed political and economic reforms under former President Rafael Correa. In fact, this paper will briefly mention 2010 as a coup attempt occurred, but it failed highlighting the weak power of the military. Finally, 2023 is important in order to highlight that in a period of twenty-three years, Ecuador witnessed one attempt which implies a decrease from thirteen attempts in a period of sixty years.

In this research paper, the main focus will be on the causes such as the powerful social movement, the main military policies, and foreign intervention that influence the pattern of military coups. Hence, relying on a single case study, which is Ecuador, is more viable and practical as these causes are prevalent to this region. Moreover, this paper discusses the impact of internal and international factors that are related to Ecuador; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized.

## **Literature Review**

Prior literature has argued that many Latin American countries have fallen victim to various military coups and governments between the 1960s and 1970s where military rule was considered the norm. Nonetheless, these recurring patterns of military coups have been declining since the eighties.

To understand the military weakening in Latin America, it is important to focus on the causes that have led to military domination in the first place. The existing study emphasizes the role of the US,

the political factors, and the economic situation as potential reasons contributing to the promotion of militarism in Latin America.

*The United States' Interests in the Military.*

The United States has never been a silent actor in Latin America. The US-Latin American relations date back to the World War II when the US and the Soviet Union were the only hegemonic giants left; hence, each wanted to spread its own power and influence in different countries.<sup>5</sup>

As the US interests were threatened by the possible rise of communism, it decided to spread its policies to Latin American countries.<sup>6</sup> The author argues that the US justified its military intervention aimed at altering the behavior in Latin America through the US' "moral mandate" mentioned in the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary view.<sup>7</sup> For instance, the Military Assistance Program (MAP) has been a vital element under which the US conducts its foreign affairs. Many have demonstrated that MAP has allowed the US, by sending military equipment and strengthening the level of military professionalism in unstable Latin American countries, to enhance the power and resources of armed forces.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the military has become an independent and strong component that can, with the help of the US, to overthrow civilian governments. This scholar depicted Latin American soldiers as "transnational tyrants" under the US control in which they execute military coups to eliminate the

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<sup>5</sup> Bode, Kenneth A. "An Aspect of United States Policy in Latin America: The Latin American Diplomats' View." *Political Science Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (1970): 471–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2147880>.

<sup>6</sup> Thyne, Clayton. "Supporter of stability or agent of agitation? The effect of US foreign policy on coups in Latin America, 1960—99." *Journal of Peace Research* 47 (2010): 449-461.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Fitch, John Samuel. "The political impact of US military aid to Latin America: Institutional and individual effects." *Armed Forces & Society* 5, no. 3(1979): 360-386.

possibility of social protests.<sup>9</sup> In the early 1950s, several bilateral arrangements took place between the US and many Latin American states where these agreements were built on maintaining internal security and expanding international aid.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the training of the Latin American army is crucial in advancing the goals of the United States' military policy where the soldiers have the power to protect themselves against external aggression.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the Latin American army officers have been seen as protectors by the population which has encouraged military forces to govern over most Latin countries.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Political Factor*

There are many controversial arguments regarding the role of the military in politics. Yet, when it comes to the political culture in Latin American countries, the military is vital in influencing political institutions, political parties, and interests' groups. The distinction between the role of the military institutions and the civil government is extremely blurred where some believe that the success and maintenance of coup d'états rely on the cooperation of the military and civilian politicians.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, according to traditional thinkers, the Latin American army had a significant influence over national organizations and public policy, which left civilian political organizations vulnerable,

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<sup>9</sup> Sigmund, Paul E. Review of *Approaches to the Study of the Military in Latin America*, by Abraham Lowenthal, J. Samuel Fitch, Robert Wesson, Alain Rouquié, Alfred Stepan, Karen Remmer, Louis Goodman, Juan Rial, Johanna S. R. Mendelson, and Paul W. Zagorski. *Comparative Politics* 26, no. 1(1993): 111–22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/422176>.

<sup>10</sup> Fitch, John Samuel (1979).

<sup>11</sup> Powell, John Duncan. "Military Assistance and Militarism in Latin America." *The Western Political Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1965): 382–92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/445004>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Needler, Martin C. "Political development and military intervention in Latin America." *American Political Science Review* 60, no. 3 (1966): 616-626.

disorganized, and unfit to form an effective political system.<sup>14</sup> These entities have been struggling to gain authority and legitimacy over military institutions.<sup>15</sup> To emphasize, in various Latin American countries, there is the lack of an adequate framework that allows civilian policymakers to deal with any regime threats.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, the military apparatus had the capabilities to dominate the political arena in most Latin American countries. One of the main reasons is that the military possesses human capital, leadership positions, and economic power allowing them to be recognized as legitimate and function effectively.<sup>17</sup> Hence, the internal structures and independent systems of communication are crucial in enhancing their crisis management readiness.

Another factor is that armed forces in various Latin American states frequently hold monopolistic control over coercive means making them more legitimate in eliminating external and internal threats.<sup>18</sup> O'Donnell described military governments in Latin America as bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes since they infiltrate into the public sector, make social bargains with multinational companies and maintain oppressive behavior.<sup>19</sup> This author adds that these regimes last longer making it challenging to alienate their clientelist chains.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> McAlister, L. N. (1965). Changing Concepts of the Role of the Military in Latin America. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 360(1), 85–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626536000108>; Bode, Kenneth A. "An Aspect of United States Policy in Latin America: The Latin American Diplomats' View." *Political Science Quarterly* 85, no. 3(1970): 471–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2147880>.

<sup>15</sup> Bode, Kenneth A. (1970).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Hiroi, Taeko, and Sawa Omori. "Causes and triggers of coups d'état: An event history analysis." *Politics & Policy* 41, no. 1 (2013) : 39- 64.

<sup>18</sup> Bode, Kenneth. A(1970).

<sup>19</sup> Handelman, Howard, and Rex Brynen. *Challenges of the developing world*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

*The Economic Conditions*

Many scholars insist on the idea that Latin America's economy is linked to two concepts: dependency and modernization. To clarify, dependency is defined as a situation where the economy of a specific entity in a state is accustomed by the progress and growth of another stronger economy in addition to restricting the dependent's possibilities of development.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, three scholars identified modernization where the state, with Western aid, can promote the advancement and expansion of the economic sector in order to transition from a traditional to a modern society.<sup>22</sup> For instance, Latin America, being known for its huge agricultural sector, has been chained solely to the coffee, sugar, copper, and other primary export goods where most Latin American countries depended on a particular export at the mercy of First World market demands.<sup>23</sup> It was not enough for most states in this region to boost their economy; therefore, many argued that the armed forces were a modernizing power in most developing states.<sup>24</sup>

One reason for the repetitive occurrence of military coups in Latin America is to restore and promote economic growth. During economic deterioration, high inflation rate, intensified exploitation, political uncertainty, weak civil society, and lack of legitimacy, the military regimes are considered the solution to these problems in Latin America.<sup>25</sup> Various studies have suggested that military governments often pledge to install fiscal discipline. For instance, in Brazil and Chile, the conservative authority imposed restriction on union activities as a way to repress wage demands, and

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<sup>21</sup> Ray, David. "The dependency model of Latin American underdevelopment: three basic fallacies." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 15, no. 1 (1973):4-20.

<sup>22</sup> Handelman, Howard, and Rex Brynen (2019). Chapter 1, pg.32-37

<sup>23</sup> DeROUEN JR, KARL, and UK HEO. "Modernization and the Military in Latin America." *British Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 3(2001) : 475–96. doi:10.1017/S0007123401000187.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Pg. 476.

<sup>25</sup> Horowitz, Irving Louis. "From Dependency to Determinism: The New Structure of Latin American Militarism." *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* (1977): 217-238.

the plan to weaken the union decreased inflation rates and enticed foreign investments.<sup>26</sup> To conclude, many critics claim that although military governments in Latin American countries have succeeded in restoring economic growth, they tend to allocate large amounts on defense and highly depend on international aid.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the fact that all the reasons above have contributed to determining whether a coup d'état were to happen or not, some factors were not addressed. First and foremost, literature has overestimated the power of the military as it depicted them as economic, political, and social heroes. Another reason is that it greatly focuses on the increase in military intervention in Latin America neglecting the fact that recently, this trend has significantly decreased. For this very reason, this research paper attempts to analyze the factors such as the role of social movement, foreign assistance, and military practices, behind the decline in military rule in Latin America, focusing on Ecuador.

### **The Republic of Ecuador: A Significant Decrease in Coup D'états**

There are multiple debates on the meaning of military coups. Nevertheless, in this research paper, military coups are defined as the success in overthrowing the current president, whether civilian or military official, by armed forces, or a small fraction of the military, with or without the support of civilians.<sup>28</sup> It is evident that in sixty years, from 1907 to 1966, Ecuador has fallen victims to thirteen different military coups which allowed political instability and unrest to govern over the country.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, from 1967 to 1991, only two military coups took place in Ecuador.<sup>30</sup> Last but not least, from 1992 till 2000, only one coup took over the cabinet, but this does not mean that in this

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<sup>26</sup> Handelman, Howard, and Rex Brynen (2019).

<sup>27</sup> Biswas, Basudeb, and Rati Ram. "Military expenditures and economic growth in less developed countries: An augmented model and further evidence." *Economic development and cultural change* 34, no. 2 (1986): 361- 372.

<sup>28</sup> Fossum, Egil (1967) : 230-231.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Dix, Robert H. pg. 443 – 444.

period, protests did not take over most Ecuadorian streets. Then, in 2010, the National Police in Ecuador organized an uprising as the president decided to decrease the military expenditure which escalated into a coup attempt. However, the failure of the coup proves the fact that the power of the military has indeed diminished which in turn interrupted the ongoing pattern of military coups.

To elaborate, the Military Intervention Index (MI) is a tool utilized to indicate the level of two elements: the regularity and amount of military involvement in the internal political arena over a certain period.<sup>31</sup> For instance, from 1966 to 1971, the MI was 2 ; while it significantly increased from 1972 till 1979 to 3 which indicates complete military intervention in politics.<sup>32</sup> Then, it decreased again to 2. Lastly, in 2023, it reached round 1.22 which is considered relatively low. All this quantitative data analysis is to show that many factors, some of which are discussed below, have contributed to that decrease, and highlights that the suppression of Ecuadorian armed forces still persist till today.

### *The Implementation of Military Policies*

It is evident that the threat of military coups today in Ecuador is nearly negligible. Nonetheless, many recent presidents have taken necessary policies in order to manage relations with the military and limit their hegemony in the political arena. For instance, left radical leaders, like Rafael Correa, have implemented coup proofing strategies to safeguard their political agendas by restricting the ability and power of the military to challenge civilian rule.

Ecuador can be considered a country that is substantially vulnerable when it comes to violent political transitions. As a response, former president Correa has adopted some techniques such as rising military salaries and budget, rotating military officers to ensure loyalty, and consistently stating

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<sup>31</sup> Kushi, S., & Toft, M. D. (2023). Introducing the Military Intervention Project: A New Dataset on US Military Interventions, 1776–2019. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 67(4), 752–779. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220027221117546>

<sup>32</sup> Dix, Robert H. pg. 444

the illegitimacy of coups.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the purpose of these strategies is to incentivize compliance and penalize the opposition.

It is important to understand that under President Rafael Correa's term, the influence and centralized power of the armed forces have diminished. To begin with, most military institutions have interfered in the political milieu aiming to increase their salaries and benefits protecting their interests and motivations. For this reason, many civilian-led governments frequently are pressurized to invest a large amount to develop military organizations as well as sometimes they are forced to provide advanced military equipment and increase military officials' salaries. For example, evidence indicated that the overall military spending in Ecuador approximately doubled over the last ten years which in turn expanded the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)<sup>34</sup>.

By comparing the shift in military spending between the years 2000 and 2004 and 2005 and 2009, the military budget in Ecuador changed a hundred percent.<sup>35</sup> One explanation for this shift is that President Correa, a radical leftist, utilized spending as a way to guarantee military obedience. As evidence to the mentioned above, at the beginning of Correa's term in 2007, he attempted to expand the budget as a whole and take into account the financial situation of military officers in order to ensure devotion of armed forces.

To elaborate, the former president called for a 25 percent raise in the salaries in the 2008 military budget; in addition to accepting high-profit highway building contracts for firms headed by armed force officials.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the military budget in Ecuador persisted to expand to the extent where

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<sup>33</sup> Rittinger, Eric. "Coup-Proofing Vulnerable Presidencies in Latin America." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. 19 Nov. 2020; Accessed 23 Apr. 2023. <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1905>.

<sup>34</sup> "Ecuadorian Military Budget." Military Budget Ecuador Comments. Accessed April 25, 2023. <http://militarybudget.org/Ecuador/>.

<sup>35</sup> "Home." International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) . Accessed April 23, 2023. <https://www.sipri.org/>.

<sup>36</sup> Romero, Simon. Ecuador's leader purges military and moves to expel American Base. New York Times. April 21, 2008a.



the budget increased 91% in 2010 as compared to that of 2006.<sup>37</sup> One cannot doubt Correa's decision when it comes to military budget since the Ecuadorian society is known for its exposure to violent military coups. However, this ongoing increase could no longer persist. In 2010, Correa stated that it is a must to consider a decrease in military spending and reduce pension plans of the armed forces and police. This statement has sparked different uprisings across the country which threatened Correa's presidential position.<sup>38</sup> Evidently, these uprisings could be described as an attempt at a military coup. In order to suppress the continuous uprisings, the former president decided to remove some opposing police and military personnels, and he also raised wages of officers which are considered a strategy to ensure future military compliance.

Even in 2021, the military spending is approximately \$ 2.41 billion which signifies that the government still allocates a huge amount to the armed forces as a way to keep them satisfied and in barracks.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, all the above proves that increasing the military budget and giving officers more benefits is a way to limit military intervention in politics which can be a reason behind the decrease in military coups in Ecuador.

Furthermore, the first thing president Correa did was halt the ongoing tradition of appointing a military officer as a defense minister. In fact, from 2007 to 2018, all of the ministers of defense were civilians. Another thing he attempted to do is update the constitution in 2008 where he allowed the military to own firms mainly related to national defense.<sup>40</sup> The above signifies the civilian president's efforts to rotate out officers which is a way to alienate disloyal personnels and at the same time

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<sup>37</sup> International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI (2011).

<sup>38</sup> Becker, Marc. "The Correa Coup." *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 1 (2016): 71-92.

<sup>39</sup> "Ecuador Military Expenditure 2022-2023." Take. Accessed April 30, 2023. <https://take-profit.org/en/statistics/military-expenditure/ecuador/>.

<sup>40</sup> Polga- Hecimovich, John. Ecuadorian Military Culture. Florida International University. September 2019.

encourage allies. As a matter of fact, whoever the civilian leader chooses to select is seen as a matter of who he trusts more. For instance, the former president expelled the high command of the police, removed the 160 Air Force generals, and halted Ecuador's relation with the United States by demanding the dismissal of most US forces from Manta's joint base<sup>41</sup> as he considered them potential spoilers that could stimulate the occurrence of military coups. The previous examples prove that civilian presidents aim to compensate military loyalists with an increase in ranking and salary; while they can also terminate or jail any potential opposition. Hence, favoring the promotion of one military personnel over the other and forming an entity of like-thinking armed commanders can be considered some of the techniques to coup proof Ecuador from any potential coup attempt.

Lastly, although all the mentioned above were methods to weaken the domination of the military, contrary to Venezuela's president, the Ecuadorian civilian presidents failed in politicizing the armed forces, and they could not drastically divide it in spite of the occupation of loyal officers in key positions.<sup>42</sup> This shows that military coups are not totally absent in Ecuador rather they just significantly decreased over time.

### *The Power of Social Movements*

Unlike other Latin American states, social movements in Ecuador were limited, yet extremely important in controlling the intervention of the military and disrupting the pattern of military attempts. In fact, indigenous movements in Latin America can be considered the foundation of every protest from 1990 to today where they are often characterized as successful.<sup>43</sup> Briefly, it is important to highlight the fact that indigenous people, which make up almost 15 % of the Ecuadorian society, were

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<sup>41</sup> Rittinger, Eric R., and Matthew R. Cleary. "Confronting coup risk in the Latin American left." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 48 (2013) : 403- 431.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Jameson, Kenneth P. "The indigenous movement in Ecuador: The struggle for a pluri-national state." *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no. 1 (2011): 63 -73.

marginalized, and were inactive when it comes to the political life.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, after years of struggles, they emerged as a powerful entity in the late 1990s where they can be depicted as one of the factors contributing to the suppression of the military.

Despite the various indigenous groups found in Ecuador, the focus is on the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador, also known as CONAIE. Evidently, this organization was formed in 1986 where its aim is to impose the social, political, and educational reforms in Ecuador. Also, in order to further spread its influence, it formed in 1996, a political party called Pachakutik which is considered the main political entity able to oppose the government by protesting or negotiating.<sup>45</sup>

One of the strategies used by social movement in Ecuador to avoid military intervention in politics is strengthen their influence and control. This is evident when the CONAIE pressured the president to amend the 2008 constitution where it recognized and allowed the participation of indigenous people in decision making processes. Hence, as a legitimate political entity, these social movements were able to build alliances with other political parties, and other marginalized and civil society institutions such as environmentalists. This highlights the fact that social movements can encourage mass mobilization aiming to voice their demands and exert pressure on the military along with other political leaders to implement democratic reforms. As evidence to the above, between the year 2000 and 2005, two uprisings took place that emphasize the power the social movement has when it comes to rejecting certain policies or governments. As a matter of fact, in 2001, the Republic of Ecuador witnessed immense demonstrations organized by CONAIE, the National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black organizations (FENOCIN) in addition to a union of students and employees. The latter established a national mobilization campaign that calls for organization of marches, roadblocks, and

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<sup>44</sup> Becker, M. , 2010. *Pachakutik: Indigenous movements and electoral politics in Ecuador*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

<sup>45</sup> Bull, Benedicte. " Social movements and the 'Pink Tide' governments in Latin America: transformation, inclusion and rejection." *Democratization in the global south: the importance of transformative politics* (2013) : 75-99.

the invasion of most television and broadcasting stations, aiming to oppose the harsh economic policies and efforts to privatize the energy and telecommunication sectors made by the president. Despite the government's decision to enforce a state of emergency, restrict public gatherings and traveling, and demand the military to arrest potential spoilers, the protests persisted which coerced President Noboa to arrange a meeting with the social movements and refrain from his previous economic decision.<sup>46</sup>

Another relevant example is that in 2000, the CONAIE backed Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, a low rank leader in the military coup, which was considered the only hope for indigenous people. However, in 2005, one popular protests governed over Ecuador which resulted in the resignation of the president back then, Lucio Gutiérrez since he did not live up to his campaigning plan and failed to tackle economic problems.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, social movements can be considered strong forces with a goal of mobilizing the population to stand up to inequalities and injustices as well as guaranteeing that regime policies align with their demands and rights.

Evidently, social movements have the resources necessary to back a president that protects their interests as they also can remove a government that failed to do so. Being a legitimate and powerful entity, social movement can promote democratic change and suppress military influence making the military less legitimate in the population's eyes. To reinforce, in less than ten years, social movement in Ecuador were able to remove three presidents from office through peaceful protests. For this reason, the social movements' capacity to enforce and prevent laws is vital as they can be depicted as political actors inside the country similar to conventional political parties. Although, Ecuadorian social movement takes action on the national level, they tend to gain power in elections in order to become

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<sup>46</sup> Von Bülow, Marisa, German Bidegain, Paul Almeida, and Allen Cordero. "Handbook of Social Movements Across Latin America." (2015): 179.

<sup>47</sup> Becker, Marc. "Ecuador's Social Movements, Electoral Politics, and Military Coups." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2019.

legitimate. As a response, social movements can start creating new political parties where they can engage and gain more seats in elections.

Additionally, they can also play a role in introducing concepts and practices into society. To strengthen the above argument, the Ecuadorian communities explicitly opposed military rule instead they supported the implementation of a democratic system. For example, after the occurrence of the successful coup aiming to remove former president, Jamil Mahuad, the public opinion polls indicated that 74% of the population wanted indigenous movement to occupy the congress. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that social movements in Ecuador were responsible for determining the success and failures of the military attempts.

#### *The United States' Interest and Motivations*

The third cause that might have led to the change in the continuous pattern of military government and coups in Ecuador is the shift in the United States interests and motivations. The relationship between the US and Ecuador dates back to the end of the cold war where the US was interested in tackling the narco-trafficking issue, spreading democratic values, and promoting economic prosperity. After the fall of the USSR in 1991, the United States shifted its foreign policy where it was more interested in the manufacturing and exportation of cocaine and confronting the issue concerning illegal immigrants.<sup>48</sup>

There is no doubt that Ecuador was exposed to the United States unchallenged power in the past. For instance, during the cold war, the US was responsible for selling weapons and training military personnels in order to combat the spread of communism.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the latter can be considered

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<sup>48</sup> Pineo, Ronn. Ecuador and the United States: Useful Strangers. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010; 2007; .pg. 189- 192

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. pg. 189 – 190.

one of the factors that strengthened the military in Ecuador which encouraged the population to regard armed forces as protectors against external aggression and as promoters of social, political, and economic prosperity.

Nonetheless, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, The United States' strategies have become more related to economic development rather than political. As evidence to the above, on the day of the coup, the Organization of American States (OAS) formed an urgent meeting where the OAS secretary general informed that any government established as a result of the coup d'état would be subject to "enormous international pressure".<sup>50</sup> Additionally, representatives of the United States' embassy, under President Clinton, organized a meeting with General Mendoza which was the previous Military high command chief and the military leader of the faction.<sup>51</sup> In the meeting, the US threatened him to stop investment if the constitutional order was not stabilized.<sup>52</sup> Hence, the US reaction was significant to stop the coup from taking place since Ecuador depends on the US when it comes to its economy. For instance, this Latin American country is considered to have various investments in the US, and the US was one of Ecuador's major trade allies. For this reason, the threat made by the US, which can gravely affect Ecuador's economic advancements, was one of the techniques to avoid a coup from happening and restore the situation back to normal. All the mentioned above are evidence that the more leverage and influence foreign states, the United States in this case, have to counter a military coup, the less likelihood of the success of the coup.

Furthermore, along with the US effort to expand Ecuadorian economy, the United States was interested in promoting democracy, transparency, and accountability. Indeed, the US' democratic aid

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<sup>50</sup> "OAS Launches Practical Guide to Inclusive Rights-Focused Responses to ..." Accessed April 30, 2023. [https://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-032/20/](https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-032/20/)

<sup>51</sup> Barracca, Steven. "Military Coups in the Post-Cold War Era: Pakistan, Ecuador and Venezuela." *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2007): 137– 54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4017797>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. pg. 149 – 150.

has diminished in 2008 by approximately half; however, it was just temporary as Hillary Clinton, former US state Secretary, reinstated the relationship with Ecuador. Thus, the US state secretary stated that the cooperation between these two states is mandatory for the consolidation of democratic norms and tackling international and internal issues. As evidence, in the 2010, when the police attempted to overthrow former president, Correa, the United States' ambassador clearly stated the US' support for Ecuadorian democratic organizations, and its willingness to back the president.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, USAID assistance was centered on civil society and the electoral procedures. To clarify, it assisted a regional non-governmental organization (NGO), so-called Participación Ciudadana, that was responsible for the supervision and political campaigning as well as it offers technical aid to the electoral board through a local human right agency (IIDH- CAPEL).<sup>54</sup> In addition, in 2021, the US granted \$ 350, 000 through NED grants to encourage citizen- initiated legislations.<sup>55</sup> In other words, it was a way to offer the Ecuadorian population the ability, resources, and chance to actively play a role in decision- making processes, and it also guarantee that the authorities would take the peoples' demands into account. For this reason, the US played a vital role in engaging the people in politics which was absent during the long period of military domination. This engagement, backed by the US, acted as a tool to suppress the military's intervention because it paved the way for civilian and civilian-led political parties to occupy legislative, judicial, and executive positions. Also, strengthening civil society made it extremely challenging for the military to take over since they now have a huge number of opposition backed by powerful giants.

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<sup>53</sup> Wolff, Jonas. "US Policy toward Ecuador." *Re-Engaging Latin America's Left? US Relations with Bolivia and Ecuador from Bush to Obama*. Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Navyag. "Ecuador 2021." NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY, February 12, 2022. <https://www.ned.org/region/latin-america-and-caribbean/ecuador-2021/>.

To summarize, the United States interventions and assistance significantly depends on the advancement and protection of its interests and security. When the United States wanted to stop the Soviet Union and the spread of communism, it indirectly supported armed forces in Ecuador. On the other hand, when communism was not considered a threat anymore, the US shifted into the promotion of democracy. Therefore, as Ecuador and the US have a strong trading relationship, mainly oil and petroleum, neither of these states can afford to lose this vital alliance. This means that the US foreign policies are volatile and adaptive as its main concern is maximizing its leverage and influence in the costless way possible, and military intervening to stop military coups in Ecuador can be extremely costly. Most importantly, it is worth noting that the United States of America, relying on a realist point of view, has depended on diplomatic efforts to avoid disrupting its relationship with Ecuador since the US needed to halt the export of illegal drugs that was affecting the US national economy.

## **Conclusion**

The year 2000 marks an important shift the political culture of Ecuador and even most Latin American countries. It is important to consider that the decline in military coups does not mean the total absence or liquidation of military rule. It is challenging to completely disband the military from the political area. For this reason, intermittent removal of head of states still exists, and armed forces persist to intervene in a restricted manner. Therefore, there is always a possibility of future military coup attempts. However, the factors that have strengthened the military in Ecuador have now shifted which in turn severely reduced the occurrence of coups. For example, worldwide conditions such as the commitment to democracy, economic development, and the awareness of the civil society have played a crucial role in suppressing armed forces and rendering them weak.



The results validate that social movements, such as CONAIE, have contributed to advancing economic policies that benefit civilian, mainly marginalized groups by strengthening their position in policy-making processes. The latter has proven to be important as these movements counter-balanced the military by pushing their own democratic and economic agenda. Moreover, international actors, like the United States, has altered its behavior from indirectly supporting the military to promoting democracy and international security and order. This indicated a shift in US foreign policy where recently it is interested in making alliances with democratic states rather than backing authoritarian military dictators. Also, this response established an environment where democratic changes can be implemented, and where the possibility of military coups is slight.

Finally, the establishment of military policies such as rotating military official, increasing military expenditure, and firing disloyal personnels is considered one of the most potent strategies to limit the military from plotting a coup. This strategy is important for several reasons. First, military policies are key in forming a transparent and explicit chain of authority among the military. To clarify, this technique allows armed forces to be dominated by civilian leaders and ensures their loyalty. Second, increasing the military budget would keep the military officials satisfied; thus, keeping them from planning to overthrow the government. Third, the continuous rotation of official shows that the more loyal the military is to the president, the higher the rank they are promoted to. Lastly, jailing or firing disloyal military officials induces fear and eliminates any potential spoiler which decreases coup attempts.

In conclusion, there are various Latin American cases that are comparable to that of Ecuador. For example, Venezuela under Hugo Chavez and Bolivia under Eco Morales have undergone similar transitions to that of Ecuador. Both their governments have relied on military policies to restrict military domination; in addition, social movement and foreign intervention were also major reasons behind the decline in military patterns in Venezuela and Bolivia.

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