

## Provincial Indigenous Leaders' Concern about Correa Administration Policy and Possible Tactics of Repression

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### Background

This report is based on fieldwork in Cotopaxi and Imbabura Provinces, Ecuador, and dialogues with indigenous community and trade association officers, June–July 2015. Additional phone conversations took place in September 2015. The community officers in Cotopaxi are involved in an ongoing dispute with the Ministry of Environment over community-based businesses that border conservation areas. In Imbabura, the leaders have worked in both indigenous organizations and positions with municipal and provincial governments.

### Findings

Within these provinces at the community level, leaders report no direct repression. In Cotopaxi, they have been able to continue to pursue a policy that runs counter to the demands of the Ministry of Environment without having their leaders suffer direct penalties. In Imbabura, recently elected municipal council members have remained unaffiliated with the government and free to pursue their political agenda.

However, in both Imbabura and Cotopaxi, community officers report a political climate of overt favoritism for pro-government politicians and punishment for anti-administration politics. This punishment comes in the form of withdrawn funding and material support, challenges to local authority, and presumed threats to the careers of opposition politicians, their allies, and their families. They see further threats to their community through administrative practices that authorize community officers independently of community elections.

In Imbabura, a longtime indigenous leader has become cautious in what he says for practical political reasons. However, his politics has always been connected to his writing and media appearances and so the self-censorship narrows the breadth of indigenous public debate in the province. His caution is reinforced by worries about his relative's appointment in a provincial government-sponsored position.

In interviews, he noted that there is fear now in Imbabura. People have seen how “all of the machinery of the state can work against a single person.” And for his part, he says that it does not stop him from speaking up, but he does not personalize his criticisms. He leaves President Correa out of it.

Asked if indigenous professionals with the government have become afraid to speak, he responded, “Of all the indigenous people in the government, none of them have the power to make a decision.” He did not see this as a sign of new repression, just the way they have always been powerless in Correa's administration.

He and other municipal government officials are careful with what they say because they do not want to jeopardize government funding of projects in the province. One cited the way Correa politically isolated the mayor of Quito, Mauricio Rodas, after he joined the 2015 “Shyris protests” against the government's new inheritance tax laws, as the fate that awaits elected officials who go against Correa. ■