# EL MIRADOR: A LOOK AT CORPORATE- COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN ECUADOR'S MINING INDUSTRY

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**Abstract**

In 2012, Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa announced the contract for the Mirador copper mine, the largest mining project in the country's history. There was early resistance to the project led by indigenous and environmental advocates, but ECSA, the Chinese firm behind the operation, has overcome it and the project continues. This research seeks to better understand how ECSA constructs corporate-community relations and how the company's strategies impact community well-being. By using survey and social media data, this study shows that ECSA uses corporate social responsibility as a tool to divide the local community and negate resistance to the mining project. By producing and framing scientific knowledge, ECSA can deny Mirador's true environmental impacts and dismiss critics. Further, the company takes advantage of the Ecuadorian state's historical neglect of the borderland and offers an array of new social services. This compels local residents to conform to ECSA's objectives in order to receive development projects, further reducing the viability of resistance. In all, this study reveals the on-the-ground impacts of Chinese investment in Latin America and how China employs corporate social responsibility to reinforce the region's dependence on extractivism.

Keywords: mining, corporate social responsibility, politics of knowledge, Ecuador, extractivism

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## INTRODUCTION

Within the last two decades, Latin America has witnessed a rapid increase in large-scale extractivism, resulting in economic growth yet heightening concerns over the environment and indigenous rights (Bainton 2020; Burchardt and Dietz 2014; Gatehouse 2023). China has been featured extensively in recent scholarship of the region's extractivism due to its increasing regional presence—over $160 billion of investment since 2000—and controversial corporate practices (Wintgens 2023). The country of Ecuador offers unique insight into Chinese investment in Latin America's extractive industry with two of five strategic mining projects being owned and operated by Chinese mega-companies in addition to various other Chinese oil and infrastructure investments. Of the two mining projects, the Mirador project—run by the Chinese subsidiary Ecuacorriente S.A. (ECSA)—has gained the most notoriety in part due to it being the largest mine in the country's history. The project spans 6,685 hectares, has generated nearly 20,000 direct and indirect jobs, and will result in an estimated 3.2 million tons of extracted copper along with some gold and silver ("Mirador Mining Project" 2020). Moreover, the project has gained national and international attention because of the anti-mining resistance that has emerged, featuring controversies over land rights, environmental impacts, and participatory processes (Báez Aristizábal and Sacher 2011; Massa et al. 2018; van Teijlingen et al. 2017).

Although previous research has examined indigenous and legal resistance to the early development of the Mirador project (Beatriz Eguiguren et al. 2016; Massa et al. 2018; van Teijlingen et al. 2017), no field work-based studies have been published on the mine since operations began in 2019. Furthermore, studies on Latin American mining typically focus on indigenous and environmental resistance. While these contributions are important, rarely

do such studies examine community relations holistically, including sociopolitical dynamics between indigenous and mestizo groups.[a] This study of the Mirador project uses such a comprehensive approach and examines how ECSA strategically uses development assistance to divide the local populace and negate resistance. This research constitutes the first field work-based study on the mine since operations began and is the first to analyze ECSA's corporate narrative as seen through its social media.

*Research Question*

As Chinese extractive investment increases in Ecuador and the Latin America region more broadly, it is important to understand the consequences on the communities of impact. These communities often give birth to conflict, which poses significant risks to the sustainability of mining operations and has far-reaching implications for the country's political economy. My research specifically seeks to answer the following questions: What are the strategies used by ESCA to construct corporate-community relations? What implications do these strategies have for the viability of local resistance to the Mirador project? To answer these questions, I use a case study of the Mirador mining project in Tundayme, Ecuador. By analyzing the impacts of the Mirador project on local well-being, I assess how Chinese community relations tactics work on-the-ground. To answer my main research questions, I ask two subquestions: As a multinational corporation (MNC), how does ECSA use the politics of knowledge to negate resistance to the Mirador project? How does ECSA use its relationship with state actors and its role as a quasi-state actor to negate

[a] The term "mestizo" was a racial caste term created by the Spaniards to denote a person of mixed blood, particularly of indigenous American and Spanish descent. In some countries like Ecuador, the term carries social and cultural connotations (e.g., pure-blooded indigenous persons that act and dress like Europeans are often called mestizos or "cholos") (Britannica 2024).

resistance to the Mirador project? The answers reveal the community relations strategies of ECSA specifically and reflect the strategies of extractive companies more generally.

*Argument*

This thesis argues that ECSA's corporate social responsibility (CSR) regime has been used to shape corporate-community relations in the company's favor, specifically by minimizing project risks and fostering local dependency on ECSA's development services. I claim that, as a result of ECSA's CSR strategies, the local population is socially fragmented and residents have become resigned to the mining operation. Groups that are socially fragmented include Shuar and Colono indigenous communities. Due to their histories and geographical positions, some such as Yanúa Kim are prone to environmental pollution and other negative impacts. There are competing approaches within these communities of how to respond to such harms, leading to infighting and community dissolution in some cases. Other indigenous communities as well as the predominantly mestizo town dwellers are better supported by ECSA with more access to employment and programming. These varying impacts as well as the newfound dependency on ECSA's CSR services have created barriers to collective organization and local anti-mining resistance, despite a growing anti-extractive movement at the national level. Thus, ECSA's CSR tactics have "worked" for the Chinese corporation and strengthened ECSA's political and economic authority in the area. This reaffirms the historical role of extractivism at fostering dependency on the Global North and marginalizing vulnerable groups.

*Methodology*

This study is based on a mixed-methods approach. To support my claims, I use public opinion and ECSA's corporate narrative as evidence. If my claims are accurate, public opinion would criticize the unequal distribution of benefits and detriments that have resulted from Project Mirador. Residents would highlight conflict within and between groups, possibly even citing the company as the instigator of such disagreements. Strong evidence would also include residents describing failures of mining resistance and collective organization. Moreover, ECSA's corporate narrative would entail the boasting of its scientific knowledge as well as the featuring of close partnerships with state actors and extensive community involvement through CSR. Together, this evidence would indicate ECSA's strong authority and deep dependence of residents on the company's CSR services, leading to social tension and lack of organized opposition to Project Mirador.

For data, I conducted 30 surveys in the town of Tundayme, Ecuador with responses from mestizo and indigenous residents, government officials, and ECSA employees. I used convenience sampling to obtain survey responses, yet I attempted to get at least one survey respondent from each stakeholder group to gain a more holistic understanding of community viewpoints. While small, I believe the sample accurately reflects the views of many groups in Tundayme, a town of approximately 1,100 people. Of my respondents, 39 was the average age; 57% were male and 43% were female; and 80% were mestizo, 17% were indigenous, and 3% were Afro-Ecuadorian (see Appendix A for more demographic statistics). Survey questions were designed using previous research on Project Mirador and on CSR in the mining industry. They gauge domains of satisfaction related to various aspects of social life, community engagement, corporate and state responsibilities, and Chinese involvement in the zone (see Appendix B for the full survey). During my research trip, I took photos and had

informal conversations, constituting participant observation data that I also use to show public opinion. In addition, I use ECSA's Instagram content from its first post in October of 2018 to November of 2023, in all constituting 765 posts. I collected the data using Zeeschuimer, a browser extension that enables the capture of social media content and metadata (Peeters 2024). The Instagram data reveals the content of ECSA's CSR, the framing of its development contributions, and the company's more subtle strategies and goals.

In terms of methods, I used statistical analysis and critical discourse analysis to reveal how community residents perceive ECSA and certain aspects of the project, such as the company's environmental impacts and development assistance. I incorporate descriptive statistics from aggregated survey responses and from stakeholder groups, such as indigenous residents. I include open-ended responses which highlight more nuanced observations than my quantitative survey questions alone, painting a better picture of the patterns and perspectives these survey data points actually signify. For the Instagram data, I used 4CAT Capture and Analysis Toolkit (4CAT) to investigate the content of ECSA's CSR investments and how the company frames these investments. 4CAT's tools enabled me to download Instagram content data and metadata into an Excel spreadsheet, aggregate captions, and count hashtag occurrences. Using critical discourse analysis, I searched for keywords relevant to knowledge politics and CSR to generalize patterns in ECSA's corporate narrative.

*Figure 1: Location of Tundayme in Ecuador*

*Historical Background*

The Mirador project is located in Zamora-Chinchipe, a southeastern province of Ecuador, on historically contested land.[1] This region of the Amazon is also the ancestral land of the Shuar indigenous nationality. With the support of the Ecuadorian state, the Catholic Church sent evangelizing missions to the area in the 1960s and facilitated a migratory wave of mestizos, Kichwa indigenous peoples, and other settlers, ultimately dispossessing many Shuar of their land and imposing on them a sedentary lifestyle (Warnaars and van Teijlingen 2017; Fernández-Salvador 2017; Quiliconi and Rodriguez Vasco 2021).[b] During the past three Ecuadorian-Peruvian wars, the Ecuadorian state encouraged migration to the area to create a "living border," serving both as justification for their territorial claim and as a human

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[b] With the migratory wave of the 1960s and 1970s came the formation of the *Colono* or "settler" identity. Many of the migrants from the Sierra (predominantly indigenous) took on the Colono label, and they established small communities and preserved cultural practices from their original province, including festivals and livestock farming (Fernández-Salvador 2017, 116). Social tensions exist between Colono and Shuar groups as they have competing notions of land ownership and ancestrality, but the shared experience of fighting in wars against Peru helped to create a common regional identity (ibid). In the present day, the Tundayme parish has a population of approximately 1,100 with Shuar persons accounting for approximately 22% (City Population 2022). Town dwellers are predominantly mestizo while Shuar and Colono persons live in 15 different communities outside the town center (van Teijlingen et al. 2017).

shield against attacks (Warnaars and van Teijlingen 2017; Quiliconi and Rodriguez Vasco 2021). Oil prospects, which largely motivated the last two wars, led the Ecuadorian state to further claim Shuar land for the purpose of extractivism beginning in the 1970s (ibid).

During the 1990s, foreign companies put pressure on the national government to make the country's oil industry more attractive for private investment (Leifsen et al. 2017). However, once President Rafael Correa assumed office in 2007, he shifted away from the neoliberal model to a more state-centered one, nationalizing resource-based industry and expanding social programs. His spending was partly restricted by loan requirements of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), causing him to sever ties with the IMF and default on over $3.2 billion in foreign debt in 2008 (de la Torre 2010; Temirov 2022). The Ecuadorian state turned to Chinese loans for spending support, and this newfound partnership coupled with rising commodity prices encouraged Correa to expand mineral extraction (Riofrancos 2017). Ultimately, after closed-door meetings between President Correa and Canadian and Chinese officials, a new mining legal regime was established in 2009 (Quiliconi and Rodriguez Vasco 2021).[2]

A year later, the Canadian mining company Corriente Resources along with its two established subsidiaries, ECSA and Explocobres SA, were purchased for $650 million by Chinese mega-companies Tongling Nonferrous Metals Group and China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC) (ibid).[3] The acquisition also entailed the transfer of 62,000 hectares of Ecuador's two largest copper deposits—Mirador and San Carlos Panantza—and the Chinese consortium (CRCC-Tongguan) announced a planned total investment of over $2 billion in the Mirador copper and gold mine (ibid; "Mirador Mining Project" 2020).

*Figure 2: Aerial view of the Mirador project site*

Since 2005, local conflict surrounding the Mirador mining project has been strong. In 2006, the resistance to large-scale mining in the southeastern part of the country caused then-President Alfredo Palacio to suspend mining operations in the Zamora Chinchipe and Morona Santiago provinces, using the Ministry of the Environment to declare the forest in the Cordillera del Cóndor as protected (Quiliconi and Vasco 2021). Later in 2008, the National Assembly passed a mining reform which included a cessation of many concessions and the suspension of operations that didn't comply with all existing regulations (Riofrancos 2017, 57-58). Nevertheless, ECSA's operations continued ("Intervención Minera" 2010).

When ECSA's contract was signed in 2012, opposition groups marched over 250 miles from Tundayme—the principal town of impact—to Quito (Riofrancos 2017, 47). Local anti-mining groups primarily consisted of indigenous Shuar peoples and farmers whose territorial claims and ways of life have been threatened by the large-scale project. In 2013, indigenous and environmental groups brought a lawsuit against ECSA and the national government on behalf of nature, using the established rights of nature written into the 2008 Constitution.[4] They argued that there would be devastating effects to local ecosystems and

the surrounding protected areas, and despite using evidence found in ECSA's and the Ministry of Environment's own reports, the case was lost, the judge ruling in the favor of "public" over "private" interest (Almeida Albuja v. Narvaez 2013).

In 2015, the community of San Marcos was forcibly removed from their ancestral lands, and promises from the company to rebuild a "new" San Marcos were never fulfilled (van Teijlingen and Warnaars 2017, 132). Moreover, local, national, and international actors have questioned the validity of the environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and enforcement of the state's regulatory regime. These stories of forced evictions, unfulfilled promises, and contested environmental impacts have fueled local and national resistance to the Mirador project and led to anti-mining coalition building in the zone. Scholarship on the project includes field work during early phases of construction (Van Teijlingen et al. 2017) and analysis of participatory processes, indigenous resistance, and EIA validity (Massa et al. 2018; Eguiguren et al. 2016; Báez Aristizábal and Sacher 2011). No field work-based scholarship has been performed and published on the Mirador project since operations began in 2019.

# CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the scholarship relevant to my research project in order to help answer my central research questions. First, I examine Latin American extractivism and political economy, followed by literature discussing corporate social responsibility in the mining industry. Finally, I review literature on Ecuador's contemporary political history.

*Latin American Extractivism and Political Economy*

Extractivism underpins the economies of many Latin American countries. As its name implies, extractivism refers to the extensive extraction of raw materials and their export, usually with little-to-no domestic processing (Gudynas 2013). Since the discovery of large oil reserves in the 1970s, the Amazon rainforest has been exploited due to an increasing demand for energy.

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a resurgence of free-market policies worldwide in what came to be known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism reinforced the role of extractivism in Latin American economies by reducing barriers to foreign investment and allowing multinational corporations (MNC) to extract natural resources including oil and minerals (Santiso 2007). Scholars widely view neoliberalism as unsuccessful, resulting in market concentration and exacerbation of social inequality (Burchardt and Dietz 2014; Santiso 2007). In response to neoliberalism's perceived failures, many leftist governments were elected in Latin America during the early 2000s—known as the "Pink Tide"—and their policies shifted development models to be more state-centered. The neodevelopmental model entailed nationalization of industry and expansion of social welfare programs, and this approach has relied on state-centered extractivism, or neoextractivism (Svampa 2019).

Many scholars are critical of neoextractivism. They highlight that even though Pink Tide leftists opposed neoliberalism and imperialism, their pursuit of autonomy and development using neoextractivism ultimately "resulted in more, not less, entanglement in the debilitating webs of transnational capital" (Arboleda 2020, 245; Purcell and Martinez 2018; Svampa 2019). Under neoextractivism, raw materials are still exported to wealthier countries and subject to fluctuations in global prices. Because of this, the social policies that extractive revenues fund can quickly disappear during times of low prices, inducing crises for the poor (Burchardt and Dietz 2014). Further, the implementation of neoextractivism in Latin America varies. In countries such as Ecuador and Peru, state-supported extractivism is coupled with policies that attract more foreign investment (van Teijlingen et al. 2017; Jurema and Oliveira 2023;). Extractive MNCs in the Global South have been sharply criticized for not complying with environmental laws, participatory processes, and other legal regimes, resulting in conflict that challenges extractive operations and state legitimacy (Amar et al. 2023; Gatehouse 2023; Irwin and Gallagher 2013; Smart 2020). To fully understand the implications of extractive development dynamics in Latin America, it's important that studies like Gatehouse (2023) and Amar et al. (2023) showcase community conflict and resistance to the extractive industry.

China's involvement in Latin America reaffirms the region's increasing ties to transnational capital (Riofrancos 2017, 49). China began growing its role in Latin America during the Pink Tide, filling in the foreign investment vacuum by initiating trade agreements and "anti-imperialist" projects (Amar et al. 2023, 15). These bilateral partnerships offer Latin American countries development assistance, including access to less-restrictive finance, and they give China strengthened access to strategic resources needed for its economy and national defense (Herrera 2023). Currently, 20 of 24 Latin American countries, including

Ecuador, have signed on to the Belt and Road Initiative, China's key foreign policy framework which seeks to develop infrastructure and integrate the economies of partner countries (Chiodi and Anh 2022).

Stronger Chinese-Latin American relations and the "reprimization" of Latin American economies has led to more dependency on Chinese MNCs, especially in the extractive sector (Amar et al. 2023; Balán and Montambeault 2019; Smart 2020). Chinese extractive projects have been sharply criticized for having some of the weakest labor and environmental records in the region, yet comparative studies like Irwin and Gallagher (2013) reveal that this could be a result of US-dominated discourse, absence of data on Chinese firms, and chronically unsuccessful public relations strategies by part of the Chinese firms.[c] Regardless, scholarly debate ensues over how China's growing presence in Latin American economies will impact development, autonomy, geopolitical dynamics, and the climate crisis (Arboleda 2020; Balán and Montambeault 2019; Smart 2020; Svampa 2019).

A common justification for the expansion of foreign involvement in Latin American development and extractivism is the need for "modernization." The modernization theory of development maintains that 'traditional' societies need economic progress to reach the final, ideal stage of development embodied by Western societies (Velasco-Herrejón et al. 2022). Proponents of modernization theory believe that the transition necessitates the abandonment of 'traditional' structural and cultural features which constrain growth (ibid). Latin America developed a governance model centered on mestizo political and cultural homogeneity, casting indigenous peoples as the "other" (Hale 2004). Subsequently, indigenous peoples are often pointed to as the impediment to modernization (Leifsen and Hogan 2017; Warnaars

[c] Tang-Lee (2016) goes even as far to say that it's a result of the extension of the Chinese state-centered, top-down governing model to state-owned enterprises.

and van Teijlingen 2017). Notwithstanding, the waves of democratization, neoliberalism, and multiculturalism that spread across the globe in the 1980s and 1990s seemingly removed previous constraints to indigenous autonomy (Hale 2004). This meant that indigenous people could participate in decision-making so long as they were "well-behaved," acting in-line with the logic of globalized capitalism (ibid). Hale uses the sociopolitical category *indio permitido*, or permitted indian, to describe that indigenous peoples could gain limited power—territorial rights and a voice in government—so long as they didn't disrupt the path to modernization. Thus, neoliberalism divided indigenous activists into the *permitido* and the dysfunctional "other" that rejects the neoliberal order.

*Corporate Social Responsibility in the Mining Industry*

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the voluntary integration of social and environmental concerns into a company's business model. As corporations began adopting this practice of social responsibility in the 1970s, there was a lack of a clear and consistent definition. In 1991, Archie B. Carroll—perhaps the most well-known CSR scholar—simplified the concept into a digestible pyramid that depicts its four components: from its base to its top they are economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities (see Fig. 3). He argues that economic responsibilities undergird all other social obligations of businesses, yet this premise has not gone without criticism. Lisa Calvano (2007) highlights the fact that previous literature on CSR overwhelmingly studied the link between social and financial performance, and she argues that businesses should prioritize these performance dimensions equally.[5] This describes the scholarly debate on CSR generally. Within the scholarship of the mining industry specifically, CSR has become increasingly important for

mining companies due to its frequent environmental degradation, controversial impacts on communities, and influence on the political economy.

*Figure 3: Carroll's CSR pyramid*

Though CSR seeks to protect the environment as a means to preserve and promote the well-being of local communities, many scholars are critical of CSR in this sense and view the practice as "greenwashing," whereby corporations release false claims about environmental impacts or compensate their environmental harm—often water contamination—with development projects (Amar 2023; Gatehouse 2023; Mutti et al. 2012; Tang-Lee 2016; Velásquez 2012). Other literature shows that the benefits of CSR are often misaligned with communities' direct needs which typically encompass the environment and their health (Tang-Lee 2016). Indeed, protecting the environment is often the primary concern for local communities when a new mining operation begins as it directly impacts their welfare (drinking, fishing, farming, etc.) (Van Teijlingen et al. 2017; Velásquez 2012).

EIAs are the main way farming and indigenous communities unite and dispute corporate claims of sustainability and environmental protection (Velásquez 2012). However, scholars of the mining industry claim that more powerful actors—namely mining corporations and governments—can brush off concerns about environmental impacts as politically motivated nonsense, even if those concerns are scientifically supported (Amar et

al. 2023; Báez Aristizábal and Sachen 2011; Leifsen and Hogan 2017; Velásquez 2012; Warnaars 2012). This reflects the politics of knowledge, a concept that refers to the ways in which knowledge is produced, circulated, and utilized, including how different actors shape narratives, ideologies, and power dynamics (Sánchez-Vázquez and Reyes Conza 2017).

Corporate use of the politics of knowledge is intentional and known as "corporate science" (Kirsch 2014). In "The Science for Profit Model," the authors undertook a large endeavor of synthesizing 68 studies to develop a typology of how corporations influence science and its use in policy and practice (Legg et al. 2021). They identified 5 macro, 19 meso, and 64 micro strategies that corporations across eight industries—including the extractive industry—consistently use to weaken regulations, prevent litigation, and increase consumption of their products, ultimately to maximize their profits. The macro strategies they identify are influencing the publication, interpretation, and reach of science to skew evidence in industry's favor as well as creating industry-friendly policymaking environments and manufacturing trust in industry and its scientific messaging. These strategies confirm the findings of previous scholarship on corporate science in the mining industry (Leifsen and Hogan 2017; Sánchez-Vázquez and Reyes Conza 2017). CSR is used as a mechanism to execute these strategies by promoting an image of "responsible" mining and reducing regulatory oversight with the incentive of development assistance (ibid; Akpan 2006).

CSR in the mining industry typically involves donations and development projects, and this assistance is used by corporations and governments to justify extractivism, claiming the aid will support the path to modernization (van Teijlingen et al. 2017). Due to CSR, scholars suggest that governments often abandon or continue their existing neglect of their development responsibilities, allowing for "corporate governance" (Akpan 2006; Warnaars

2012). Hence, many scholars claim that CSR in the extractive sector results in the weakening of democratic systems (Akpan 2006; Burchardt and Deitz 2014; Pesmatzoglou et al. 2012).

The gifting of development assistance is also used as a strategy to appease local groups and gain a social license to operate (SLO): the acceptance of the mining operation by the community (Saenz 2018; Thomson and Boutilier 2011; van Teijlingen and Warnaars 2017). One obstacle corporations face when gaining a SLO is that community members feel unheard in decision making processes (Akpan 2006; Saenz 2018). When corporations communicate with community members, it is often through local government structures, yet community leaders often align with corporate interests to protect their leadership status and to receive development projects (Akpan 2006; Petkova et al. 2014). These dynamics foster competition between groups for CSR benefits and disagreement within groups over how leaders should accurately represent their interests (ibid). Some academics argue that corporations purposefully learn the local cultural and political landscape in order to capitalize on previous sociopolitical tensions (Mutti et al. 2012; Tang-Lee 2016; Warnaars 2012).

Whether intentional or not, perceived failures of CSR to support the needs of community residents can lead to resistance that reaches the national level (Van Teijlingen et al. 2017; Velásquez 2012). In Ecuador, indigenous opposition to extractive projects has resulted in protests which have crippled the country's political and economic functions. Amar et al. (2023) describe how CSR failures and subsequent indigenous protests have led to the premature closure of Chinese projects in Latin America, and such protests dissuade future investors from pursuing extractive projects in the host country. This can put countries dependent on extractivism in an extremely precarious situation. In Latin America, raw materials account for 33% percent of the region's total exports and 45% of Ecuador's exports (Hidalgo and Simoes 2012; World Bank 2023).

*Contemporary Political History of Ecuador*

In 2007, a political outsider was elected to the presidency in Ecuador: Rafael Correa. He ran on a leftist, anti-neoliberal platform that mirrored the rise of other leftist politicians across Latin America (Riofrancos 2017). One of his first acts as president was calling for a new constitution which was ratified by a referendum in 2008. The constitutional reform made Ecuador the first country in the world to give rights to nature, a part of Correa's mission to achieve "Sumak Kawsay," "Buen Vivir," or "good living." Additionally, the new document widened citizens' rights, especially the collective rights of indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples, and strengthened the executive branch (de la Torre 2010). The strengthening of presidential power was framed by Correa as the most effective avenue to enact more social programs (Conaghan 2016). Indeed, public expenditures rose from 4.3% in 2006 to 8.6% in 2017 (Correa's last year in office) (Decade of Reform). This increase in social spending along with new policies such as a higher minimum wage were quite successful with increased economic growth, falling poverty rates, and a closing inequality gap (Becker 2013).

Despite these political and economic successes, many of Correa's original supporters were left disenchanted. Particularly, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE)—the country's largest indigenous organization that lent significant support to Correa's presidential campaigns—was frustrated with Correa's expansion of the extractive sector (Becker 2013; Riofrancos 2017). A looser regulatory environment developed by Correa led to the arrival of more, particularly Chinese, MNC projects which were implemented without consulting with the rural and indigenous sectors (Peng 2023). This contradicted Correa's earlier commitments to environmental and indigenous advocates and caused protests that were quelled by the military (Becker 2013). Journalists that reported

about the violent repression were gagged, and this media suppression, a collapse in public finances, and corruption scandals characterized the final years of Correa's administration.

Lenín Moreno, Correa's hand-picked successor, was elected in 2017 yet shocked many observers with his sharp political contrast to Correa. He began investigations on many of Correa's allies for corruption and relaunched free trade negotiations with the United States (Wolff 2018). Though he included CONAIE representatives in his administration, he ultimately pursued a neoliberal agenda and continued the extractive development of his predecessor, albeit oriented more towards foreign investment rather than state control (Wolff 2018). His neoliberal policies, reduced social spending, and elimination of fuel subsidies sparked nation-wide protests for 11 straight days (Olivares and Medina 2020).

Following Moreno, Guillermo Lasso was elected president in 2021, the country's first conservative president in nearly 15 years. He promoted international trade through free trade agreements with countries like Chile, China, and Mexico, and he reduced deficit spending to fulfill commitments with the IMF. Revised loan agreements unlocked $800 million in additional funds but required austerity measures including the end of fuel subsidies. These measures were strongly opposed since they reduced public services and were associated with rising prices of food, fuel, and other basic goods (Sánchez and Granados 2023). As a result, in 2022, CONAIE organized a national strike that crippled Quito and other parts of the country for 18 days (Sánchez and Granados 2023).

Due to a series of corruption scandals, Lasso underwent his second impeachment trial by the National Assembly in May of 2023. This trial was cut short as Lasso activated a new provision under the 2008 Constitution titled the *muerte cruzada*, or cross death, which dissolved the legislature and called for new elections in the fall. In August, the same day as the snap general election for a new president, Ecuadorians voted yes in a referendum to

indefinitely suspend oil and mining activities in Yasuní National Park, one of the most biodiverse areas in the world, and the Chocó Andino, a recently declared biosphere just northwest of Quito (Calle 2023; "The Future of Yasuní" 2023). Despite the apparent victory for extractivism opponents, current Ecuadorian President Daniel Naboa announced a moratorium on the implementation of the referendum, allowing for continued drilling in Yasuní. This reflects the instability of Ecuadorian politics and highlights the political estabishment's perceived need to advance extractivism despite the general population's opposition to it (Calle 2023).

# CHAPTER 2: POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

In this chapter, I seek to delineate ECSA's corporate-community relations strategies and the impacts of Chinese investment on local wellbeing and mining resistance. I argue that ECSA intentionally wields the politics of knowledge, especially in relation to Mirador's environmental impact, to delegitimize criticism from local residents and protect its operations. This strategy involves rewarding those who conform to ECSA's narrative and punishing those who don't, resulting in social fragmentation between and within groups. I begin by presenting ESCA's narrative of corporate responsibility as seen on social media. Next, I show locals' perspectives towards ECSA's environmental narrative and explain why they largely do not view ECSA as a trustworthy actor. Finally, I discuss ECSA's strategies of corporate science and their impacts on community relations and resistance.

*ECSA's Corporate Narrative*

On Instagram, ECSA presents its record of CSR in the local community, including its economic, social, and environmental contributions, overall promoting a multifaceted image of responsible mining. After #ECSA, the hashtag "mining with responsibility" (#mineríaconresponsibilidad) was the most repeated term in all content captions, appearing a total of 670 times (see Appendix C for more hashtag data). In this section, I analyze how ECSA interprets and publicly frames "responsible mining." I argue that ECSA promotes itself as a trustworthy actor by demonstrating its compliance with the Ecuadorian regulatory regime, regular environmental research, and role as an educator within the local community.

The mining company frequently posts about its compliance with environmental laws. For example, the very first post on ECSA's Instagram account explains what an

environmental license is and the caption reads “#Ecsa complies with environmental regulations in the #MiradorProject. We are #ResponsibleMining” (October 1st, 2018).[d] This first post is an indirect response to the primary criticism of the project by environmental and indigenous groups: water pollution (Sánchez-Vázquez and Reyes Conza 2017). Through regular posts like this, ECSA presents itself as conforming with Ecuador’s legal regime.

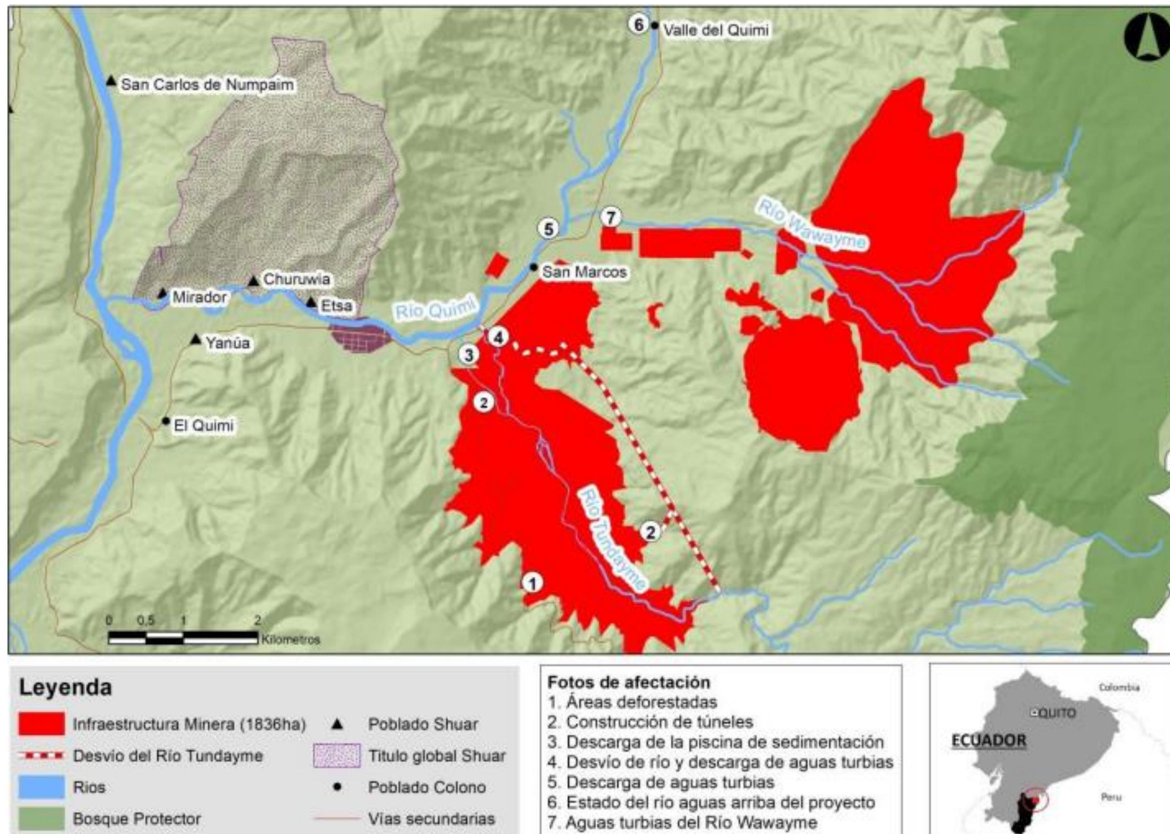


*Figure 4: The greater Mirador project area*

Additionally, ECSA’s Instagram highlights several methods of environmental protection and restoration, all of which are heavily research-based. Perhaps most featured is their “strict control and management of both solid and liquid waste” and protection of water sources (October 12th, 2018). The company posts about their regular monitoring of the

[d] This quote as well as all the following quotes from ECSA’s Instagram were translated from Spanish to English by the author. Scholarship in Spanish, survey quotes, and quotes from Ecuadorian government officials were also translated by the author unless otherwise stated.

Tundayme, Wawayme, and El Quimi rivers, stating that their water quality testing results "have been totally satisfactory" with the Ministry of the Environment (June 7th, 2019). The concern of water contamination is important to the local populace due to the geography of the area (Leifsen and Hogan 2017, 218). As shown in Figure 4, the Quimi River runs by the Mirador project site and then goes downstream, passing by the town of Tundayme as well as the Etsa, Churuwia, and Mirador Shuar indigenous communities, ultimately feeding into the Zamora River. Accordingly, one post suggests that the Quimi river is the most closely monitored river since "the #Tundayme parroquial is the direct zone of influence of the #MiradorProject, and … it's our commitment to guarantee that the mining operations don't affect the population" (June 9th, 2019).

ECSA also highlights its contributions to environmental restoration. One of its first Instagram posts described its "program of revegetation with 100% of vegetal rehabilitation of the affected areas" (October 29th, 2018), and while many similar posts boast the company's revegetation efforts, it is never defined what 100% rehabilitation of affected areas specifically means. Another post stated that the company has reforested over 210 hectares between January of 2016 and February of 2021 (March 19th, 2021). To do so, ECSA collects native flora and fauna and grows it in their own forest nursery and researches endemic species. In addition, ECSA claims to contribute towards preventative and relief measures from natural environmental challenges such as rough storms and flooding. In all, ECSA's research and restoration work aligns with a typical strategy that corporations use to influence science: "fund and undertake 'safe' research" (Legg at al. 2021, 7). This "safe" research helps ECSA to demonstrate the company's environmental consciousness—distracting from Mirador's environmental negative impacts and covertly compensating for them.

Derived from its expertise on all things mining, ECSA often hosts and promotes events to educate local residents about the company's EIAs and management plan. The very first of these events was the "citizen participation process of the complementary study and environmental management plan," an event required by law and jointly hosted with the Ministry of the Environment (June 28th, 2019). The event was held in El Pangui on June 29th, 2019 at 5pm though the Instagram announcement had been made only one day before at 7:02pm, giving less than a 24 hour notice (at least on social media). The post was very technical with citations of relevant law and codes of mining concessions, and the abstract of the event listed a long series of construction activities to be discussed. The announcement explains that the public comments at the event were made available on the Ministry's blog but only for a week after the event. The short notice of the event, the overload of technical information, and the short window for the event's public record all indicate a lack of desire for wide engagement in the "citizen participation process." Similarly, each year, ECSA invites Instagram viewers to attend Expominas, a national mining conference where ECSA usually leads presentations. Although locals probably don't attend these technical events, they are used as evidence of "transparency" and to reinforce ECSA's "industry leading" position within Ecuador's mining industry.

ECSA also uses environmental education events to inform local residents why they, not the mining company itself, should be more environmentally conscious. For example, one post features a local "training in environmental management, industrial safety and occupational health" (November 19th, 2022). Company representatives presented "home safety recommendations during the Christmas season, the use of water in lubricators, washing machines and automotive mechanics, among others." However, the post caption said that after the talk, "attendees raised their concerns and suggestions regarding

environmental management and industrial safety at the #MinaMirador." Despite the event's framing, it seems that attendees were more interested in learning about the reality of Mirador's environmental impact and labor conditions than their own environmental footprints. Events like these are often used by corporations to "disseminate industry-favorable scientific messaging" and to "manufacture trust in industry and its science" (Legg et al. 2021, 8, 16).[6]

*Figure 5: Posts from ECSA's Instagram offering advice on sustainable living*

There is a pattern of ECSA reducing discussion of their own environmental practices and shifting the conversation to make locals feel more responsible for their energy consumption and emissions. Interestingly, approximately half of the environmental posts on ECSA's Instagram are infographics on the three R's, explaining how to reduce, reuse, and recycle (see Fig. 5). One such post explains how to use a refrigerator in an environmentally conscious way: "The refrigerator consumes more energy than any other household appliance. Therefore, we indicate some considerations to keep your energy consumption to a minimum" (March 4th, 2021). This tactic by ECSA is similar to its parent company, Corriente Resources, when it was Canadian-owned. During a radio interview in 2008, a representative for Corriente Resources was pressed about the company's environmental impacts and asserted that the other activities like farming and ranching result in more environmental harm

than the mining project itself (Warnaars 2012, 8). This left the people in the project area, majority farmers at the time, even more irritated than before (ibid). The strategy of extractive companies crediting environmental damages to locals rather than the projects is quite common according to many scholars as it's intended to reduce attention from the industry's pollution and to negate any bad finding from an EIA (Amar et al. 2023; Báez Aristizábal and Sachen 2011; Leifsen and Hogan 2017; Velásquez 2012).

*Figure 6: Outdoor murals in Tundayme showcasing biodiversity*

Further, the mining company utilizes images of plants and animals to promote their consciousness of biodiversity and regional identity to attain more rapport. On the central plaza in Tundayme which was financed and constructed by ECSA, there is a mural showcasing Amazonian biodiversity, and only a few blocks away is another mural, appearing to draw the connection between life, the care of the environment, and indigeneity (see Fig. 6). Though the latter mural might not have been painted by the company, the similarity of the nature-based one on the plaza demonstrates the intentional integration of the company into the Amazonian identity. On the company's Instagram, similar strategies are apparent. Every year the company recognizes the anniversary of the parroquial of Tundayme, the canton of El Pangui, and province of Zamora-Chinchipe with many posts featuring pictures

of animals, greenery, and indigenous individuals (see Fig. 7). One caption reads: "Congratulations to the Land of Birds and Waterfalls!" (October 6th, 2022). Another recounts ECSA's participation in El Pangui's "festivities of the Amazon orchid" where the company "joins the celebration of this beautiful Ecuadorian paradise" (February 9th, 2023). ECSA makes these posts and includes nature-based and ancestral elements to foster a sense of shared community and identity that exceeds notions of neighborliness. The flowers and feathers are ways to help the company assimilate and subsequently gain the community's trust in ECSA's environmental stewardship of the land.

*Figure 7: ECSA Instagram posts celebrating province and canton anniversaries*

*Perspectives from Community Residents*

Surveys with inhabitants of the Mirador project area reveal the lived experiences of Mirador's sociopolitical and environmental impacts. Using survey data and participant observation data, I show that community residents widely disagree with many "facts" presented by ECSA, especially as they relate to ECSA's environmental record. However, the extent of disagreement with ECSA's narrative, and even convergence between it and community perspectives, is broadly aligned along lines of ethnicity.

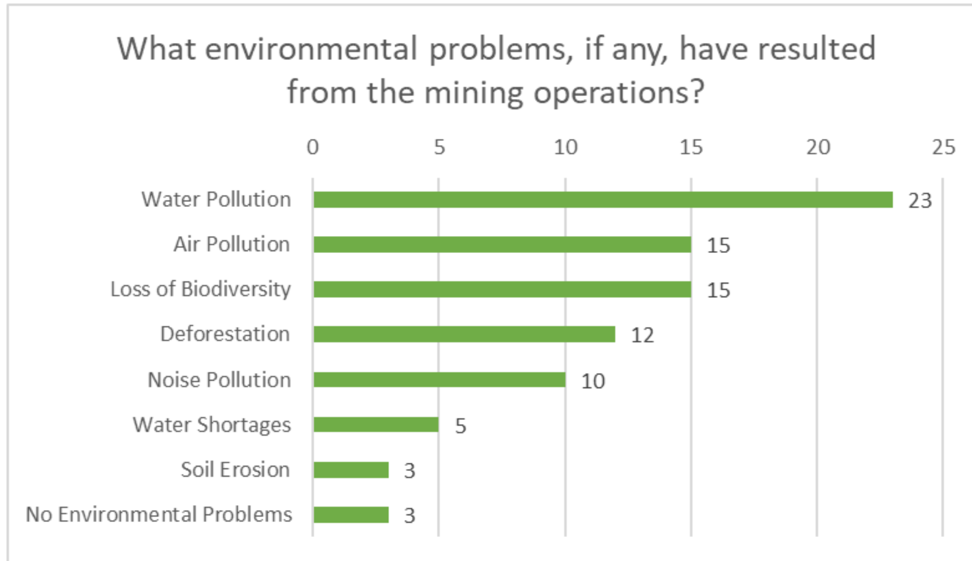


*Figure 8: Environmental problems identified by survey respondents*

In terms of the environment, the evidence is clear that the majority of Tundayme townsfolk and indigenous inhabitants of the zone believe the Mirador project to be harmful. One survey question asked respondents to evaluate changes, if any, to a variety of categories since the arrival of Project Mirador including economic development, education, employment, the environment, infrastructure, quality of life, and traffic. While all other categories had majority positive ratings, the environment and traffic categories had more negative reviews. Excluding responses from two ECSA public relations officials, 62% of respondents (16 of 26) think that the environment has gotten worse since the arrival of the Mirador project.[e] Another survey question asked respondents to identify environmental problems, if any, that have resulted from the mining operation (see Fig. 8). Only three of 27 respondents claimed there to be no environmental problems. On average, respondents listed just over three environmental problems, the top three being water pollution (85%; 23 of 27), air pollution (56%; 15 of 27), and loss of biodiversity (56%; 15 of 27). The fact that most

[e] All the following survey statistics also exclude the two ECSA public relations officials unless otherwise stated.

respondents identify specific environmental impacts shows that locals disagree with ECSA's insistence on Mirador's environmental integrity.

Later survey questions gauged residents' perceptions of ECSA's compliance with Ecuador's environmental laws. One question asked if there were known violations of environmental laws, and exactly half of respondents claimed that there were indeed violations (14 of 28), seven claiming that there were none, and another seven claimed they did not know. Describing the violations, four respondents indicated water pollution "as obvious evidence" with one saying "you can see it." Others describe death to flora and fauna, interference with surrounding nature reserves, and violations to the country's mining law. Although many residents lack the precise knowledge of Ecuador's national laws, these results reveal that there is general mistrust by locals of ECSA's corporate practices. This mistrust is not unfounded—as might be claimed by the company—but grounded in the locals' lived experiences. This is evidenced by respondents' greater certainty regarding environmental violations compared to labor violations. For instance, claims of environmental violations cited instances of "obvious water pollution," while claims of labor violations were often based on hearsay, with phrases such as "I've heard…" and "I don't know, I haven't worked in the company."

After thorough analysis of survey data, findings are more or less ambiguous for the categories of age, sex, and origin. Instead, the most obvious source of diverging environmental perceptions is ethnicity. Indigenous respondents—which even included one ECSA employee—had a lower average satisfaction of the Mirador project at 6 out of 10 compared to 7.1 out of 10 for mestizo respondents. The average indigenous rating of environmental changes was also lower than the average mestizo rating (see Fig. 9). Further, indigenous survey respondents on average mentioned exactly four environmental problems

that have resulted from Project Mirador while their mestizo counterparts on average cited exactly three. This suggests that indigenous disapproval of the Mirador project is associated with their more negative views of the project's environmental effects. This correlation is logical given that indigenous communities have distinct relationships with the land compared to their mestizo counterparts, and as a result of their geographical marginalization, they often lack access to treated and piped water and rely more heavily on the natural environment for their daily needs (Leifsen and Hogan, 2017).

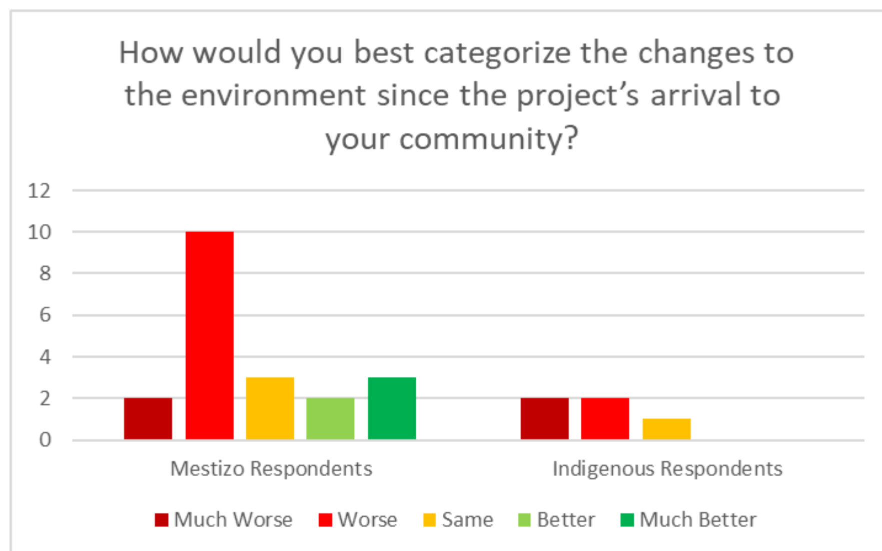


*Figure 9: Mestizo and indigenous survey responses to environmental changes*

There are also differences between indigenous groups in the zone. For instance, members of the Etsa community declined to take the survey, and I later learned that the majority of them work for ECSA. A member of the Churuwia community whom I surveyed also worked for the company. She didn't think there were violations to environmental laws—albeit identifying water pollution as an impact of Mirador—and rated her satisfaction with the mining project 10 out of 10. While her employment in ECSA most likely influences her positive perception of the company and its environmental record, this could also be because

she mentioned ECSA "teaches us how to take care of the environment." This shows an instance of "success" for ECSA at using environmental education to manufacture trust in its scientific messaging.

In stark contrast, the Yanúa-Kim community has few members employed by ECSA and is very reliant on the natural environment, including subsistence farming and cocoa production.[7] A survey respondent from Yanúa was very critical of ECSA in almost every aspect but especially the company's environmental impact, adamant that there in fact was water, air, and noise pollution that posed a constant challenge to daily life. Like others, he indicated the brown color of the river as evidence of pollution and claimed that their crops don't grow as well, and they no longer bathe or drink from the river, instead relying on nearby waterfalls which often run dry. He said dust and noise are constant since the community is located along the Tundayme Avenue, and trucks for transport come and go at all times of the day and night. It's this unfavorable and forced transformation of daily life as well as the unsolved murder of his brother and former anti-mining leader that fuel his resentment for the company and its denial of environmental harms.

*Discussion*

Together, ECSA's corporate narrative and the perspectives of community residents offer a window into how the mining company wields the politics of knowledge for its own benefit and to the community's detriment. In this section, I argue that ECSA, derived from its self-characterization as "responsible," can construct barriers to information, generate uncertainty about Project Mirador, and shift blame onto residents for perceived problems.

First, ECSA touts itself as being the embodiment of "responsible mining." Even the location of the Mirador mine in the biodiverse area that is the Cordillera del Cóndor was

justified by the company and national authorities because ECSA claimed that it could hold itself "accountable." According to Leifsen and Hogan (2017), the main way ECSA establishes and executes its self-accountability, at least in an environmental sense, is through its environmental management plan. These plans are used by extractive corporations "to define the operating standards that the authorities will use to establish compliance" (ibid, 214). This corresponds to Macro Strategy D of the science for profit typology: "Create industry-friendly policymaking environments which shape the use of science in policy decision-making in industry's favour" (Legg et al. 2014, 8). The success of this strategy is evident from a radio interview with the former Minister of the Environment. He stated that despite environmental damage "due to non-compliance with the Environmental Management Plan," ECSA has control instruments "and the capacity to resolve it" (Teleamazonas Ecuador 2017). Thus, the notion of "self-accountability" represented by environmental management plans allows ECSA to own scientific knowledge production and dissemination.

As a "responsible" actor, ECSA can define "scientific" knowledge and frame the Mirador project in a positive light, "minimizing possible negative environmental impacts or presenting uncertain results about them" (Sánchez-Vázquez and Reyes Conza 2017, 254-255). Since the beginning of the project, the company and the national government have rejected proposals from the local GAD and community residents to be included in a formal participatory oversight system of Mirador's environmental management (Leifsen and Hogan 2017, 215). Further, ECSA withholds environmental findings from residents. Though Project Mirador's EIAs can be found on the Internet, "periodic inspection reports of the environmental management plan are inaccessible to the general public" (Sánchez-Vázquez and Reyes Conza 2017, 237). This corresponds to Meso Strategy 11 of the science for profit typology: "protect industry evidence from being discovered or accessed" (Legg et al. 2014,

8). ECSA's gatekeeping of scientific knowledge makes it near impossible for residents to know about the true environmental impacts and disaster potential of the mining operation.

This strategic practice of corporate science to conceal information indeed creates much uncertainty about the reality of Project Mirador. As shown in the community perspectives section, the majority of respondents believe there to be negative environmental impacts of Project Mirador, but the average resident is not able to conduct their own water and soil quality studies nor is well-versed in the law. This indicates that residents aren't completely satisfied with the project but lack the tools and sociopolitical power to critically assess and publicly counter ECSA's narrative. Even if extractive companies can't quell rumors about pollution or other illegal acts, "at least they do manage to generate scientific controversy and uncertainty regarding the scientific data generated against them" (ibid, 247-248). The results of field research on Project Mirador by scientists and environmental advocates are dismissed as politically motivated or, as the judge deemed in the Cóndor-Mirador case, not sufficient to override "public" interest in the mining project (Sánchez-Vázquez and Conze 2017; Almeida Albuja v. Narvaez 2013).

In addition to knowledge concealment and the production of uncertainty, ECSA and other extractive corporations routinely practice blame-shifting. For instance, ECSA often cites that its operations are satisfactory for national authorities, and an ECSA employee's survey response stated that "governmental organs control the correct use of environmental management plans." Instead of saying outright that there aren't any violations, the national government is pointed to as the enforcer of the law. While this is true de jure, it reflects a facade of accountability that in reality doesn't exist due to the shared motive of ECSA and the government for the project to succeed. Another example is that mining companies use EIAs during exploitation phases to find pre-existing water contamination so that future

complaints of pollution can be connected back to the original condition (Sánchez-Vázquez and Reyes Conza 2017, 246). As mentioned earlier, this strategy was apparent when Corriente Resources blamed farmers for water contamination in 2008 and by ECSA accrediting water pollution to informal mining that predated Project Mirador.

The extractive industry uses corporate science to produce, conceal, and frame knowledge; generate uncertainty about the facts; and shift blame for wrongdoing to other actors. As an arm of CSR, corporate science serves predominantly as a public relations tool. It helps minimize the harms of extractive projects and quell resistance, ultimately protecting the longevity and profits of the operation. To this end, the politics of knowledge also yields more malicious results: social division. Whether intentional or not, ECSA has exacerbated social tensions between and within mestizo and indigenous groups.

Firstly, the politics of knowledge wielded by ECSA creates rifts and fuels existing tension between indigenous and mestizo residents. In general, indigenous groups harbor varying degrees of bitterness to mestizo town dwellers who are more included in company programming, less impacted by Mirador's environmental degradation, and more trusting of ECSA and its corporate narrative. From the perspective of mestizo residents, some acknowledge the environmental disparity such as one mestiza survey respondent who stated that "environmental contamination [creates] damage to areas with the presence of native groups." However, no mestizo survey respondent identified sociopolitical imbalances that occur as a result from Project Mirador.

Due to ECSA's denial of environmental impacts, conflicts also have arisen between indigenous groups. As Fernández-Salvador (2017) asserts, the positions of Shuar communities and their members towards large-scale mining are heterogeneous. Due to their differentiated geographical positions and ways of subsistence living, some communities are

less able to participate in project activities (employment, programming, etc.) and are more prone to environmental changes. For example, the Yanúa-Kim community is located directly on a riverbank while the others I surveyed were not, and the survey respondent from Yanúa claimed that they have been severely impacted by water contamination. Further, Yanúa was one of the first voices of local resistance towards Project Mirador and historically has been the strongest partner with external anti-mining organizations like Ecology Action (ibid). However, from Fernández-Salvador's interviews with a Yanúa member, it's clear that their "activism was solitary and that they couldn't count on the support of the leaders of nearby communities" (ibid, 160). The other communities don't perceive the same extent of environmental harm, and this frustrates and alienates Yanúa members. From the logic of the Yanúa survey respondent, opposition to Project Mirador is unsuccessful because other indigenous communities conform with ECSA's narrative, minimizing or ignoring altogether negative environmental impacts.

Conflict has also arisen within indigenous groups themselves as a result of ECSA's corporate science. Again, Yanúa offers the strongest example, at least from survey data. The Yanúa respondent described in much detail how the recently elected leader of the community began working with ECSA to receive development projects, effectively disregarding the community's pollution-induced struggles and history of resistance. This reflects how, under "stakeholder enegagement," leaders can be coerced to comply with corporate demands or risk future development projects, jeopardizing the leader's local legitimacy or even dividing the community among lines of allegiance (Akpan 2006; Fernández-Salvador 2017, 170). Other Shuar communities are similarly divided along their willingness to work with ECSA—as in the case of Churuwia's dissolution—and their positions are dependent upon "the specific experiences of the leaders and the histories of their communities" (Fernández-

Salvador 2017, 153). However, Yanúa's case is extremely relevant to the acceptance of corporate science because working with ECSA means forfeiting the right to criticize its scientific narrative.

*Conclusion*

ECSA uses corporate science to negate criticism and divide groups. The social tension is sometimes identified by residents as the reason ECSA can get away with illegal operating practices. As one respondent puts it, ECSA's violations of national law are "not all the company's fault but it's a bigger, social problem." The politics of knowledge wielded by ECSA pits indigenous communities against the less disadvantaged mestizo residents and pits community members against their own who disagree with how to respond to ECSA's abuse of the environment. This division can help explain why resistance to Project Mirador has historically been fluid, disorganized, and recently near obsolete.

More broadly, ECSA's use of corporate science marginalizes indigenous persons and communities similar to the way neoliberalism did. As previously mentioned, neoliberalism gave indigenous peoples more agency so long as it didn't undermine the logic of globalized capitalism (Hale 2004). In this way, neoliberalism still perpetuated the subordination of the indigenous "others" to the economic and political system based in mestizo homogeneity (ibid). In the case of Project Mirador, ECSA uses its political and economic power to reward the "indios permitidos" who cooperate with the company and to foster the socioeconomic exclusion and division of those who resist it. The local Shuar can challenge their marginalized status and receive economic benefits by accepting ECSA's scientific knowledge, but they surrender their ability to identify negative impacts and to seek solutions to them.

# CHAPTER 3: STATE LEGITIMACY

When President Correa announced the Mirador project in 2012, it was framed as a significant opportunity to increase tax revenue and social services and to develop the southeastern region of the country. Nevertheless, indigenous protests immediately commenced against the project, citing the lack of prior consultation and potential environmental degradation. It is within this context that ECSA committed over $100 million in advanced royalties to be used for social investments in areas around the mine (Riofrancos 2017, 61). From the beginning, ECSA has worked with the Ecuadorian state to safeguard the success of Project Mirador for their mutual benefit and has utilized CSR to gain a SLO.

In this chapter, I explore how ECSA uses its relationship with Ecuadorian state actors and its own role as a quasi-state actor to stifle resistance to the Mirador project. I begin by analyzing ECSA's corporate narrative as seen on social media where the mining MNC emulates itself as a strong partner with the Ecuadorian state and a propellent of modernization. I then analyze perspectives of community residents using survey data. While some look favorably upon ECSA's economic development contributions, others view the company as an irresponsible actor, using CSR to compensate for negative impacts. In the discussion section, I argue that ECSA uses its role with the state to amass authority and wields CSR in the historically neglected borderland to foster dependency on development projects. This ultimately leads to social fragmentation along lines of allegiance to ECSA as well as powerful deterrents to resistance.

### *ECSA's Corporate Narrative*

ECSA presents itself on social media as having a strong partnership with Ecuadorian state authorities and derives legitimacy as a quasi-state actor from this relationship. Of 765

Instagram captions, 173 mention the word “convenio” or “acuerdo” (agreement) which refer to agreements signed between ECSA and state authorities to implement a CSR project (see Fig. 10 for an example). Most of these agreements are with the *gobierno autónomo descentralizado* (GAD) (decentralized autonomous government) of the Tundayme parish and other local governments, but some are with the national agencies such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Environment. While these agreements reflect joint initiatives, the bulk of the services are financed and carried out by ECSA. This shows that the collaborative framing of ECSA’s CSR projects is used to accord legitimacy to its services and itself as a state-like actor.

*Figure 10: An agreement between ECSA and the GAD of El Pangui for a hotelier course*

Aside from written agreements, ECSA demonstrates its close relationship with state authorities through its events. At these public events, government officials attend and give short speeches, thanking the company for its support of the local community. For example, at the company’s open house for International Day of Biodiversity which I attended, the zonal director for the Ministry of the Environment and the vicepresident of the Tundayme GAD were present, and the former said that “ECSA is a committed partner for the sustainable development of the country’s mining industry.” These public demonstrations of ECSA’s

partnership with the Ecuadorian state give legitimacy to ECSA's specific actions, such as its environmental work during the biodiversity event, but also work in the aggregate to improve the company's rapport and serve as evidence of the legality of the company's operations.

Moreover, ECSA promoted its cooperation with state actors during the COVID-19 pandemic by posting video interviews with state authorities. In these videos, state authorities like the governor of the Zamora Chinchipe province and the director of the provincial judicial council would thank the company for its donation of masks and rapid tests. In one, the president of the Tundayme GAD implied that the local area had yet to have one positive COVID case due to the company's support of public health (June 16th, 2020). Maintaining an image of confidence and control was key to prevent internal and external criticisms related to the pandemic, and the company largely used its "solidarity with Ecuador " public health campaign and its relationship with state authorities to accomplish this. These videos of grateful government officials served to publicly affirm that ECSA has the state's trust.

Given its legitimacy as a quasi-state actor, the mining company can finance and perform services that are typically carried out by the Ecuadorian state. Together, the responses of the two surveyed employees of ECSA's public relations department indicated that the company is responsible to the community for high standards of health and security, effective and transparent communication, contributions to small and medium sized businesses, the creation of training and education programs for work, development of local infrastructure, sustainable development, the payment of taxes and royalties, and the creation of jobs. The only responses neither selected were anticorruption policies and environmental protection and regulation. This indicates that ECSA feels responsible or at least justified for its wide-array of state-like services to the community of impact. These services entail a

variety of economic and social investments such as schools, healthcare facilities, infrastructure, and other state-like services.

While these voluntary CSR services are framed as ECSA's way of supporting the local and regional inhabitants, they often work in the favor of the company itself, whether they be to gain rapport, deflect criticism, or strengthen infrastructure and access to project inputs. For example, ECSA invests in regional security, namely through the police. Nine posts have been made dedicated to the police, and most concern their help with the distribution of health kits and medical services during the pandemic. However, a few feature closer partnerships. These posts publicize investments in infrastructure and facilities including crisis rooms and surveillance camera systems for police units in the Zamora-Chinchipe, Loja and El Oro provinces (April 5th, 2021; June 3rd, 2021). This investment in regional security helps reduce crime—a risk to mining operations and the transport of copper ore—and make the local citizenry feel more secure. The strengthened police force also serves as a de facto security team for ECSA, helping quell potential protests against the Mirador project.[8] This demonstrates that ECSA's social investments serve an ulterior motive to safeguard operations despite their more good-willed framing.

In all, ECSA's institutional alliance and CSR services reflect ECSA's stated commitment to usher in "a new era of progress thanks to the development of the mining industry" and to make "the Tundayme parish the most prosperous one in the country" (Oct. 18th, 2018; van Teijlingen and Warnaars 2017, 119). This modernization discourse is frequently employed by both ECSA and state actors to justify extractivism, and the promise of development is significant to inhabitants who have historically been neglected.

*Perspectives from Community Residents*

In this section, I show that the narrative ECSA produces of working with Ecuadorian state actors for the good of the populace doesn't connect with many residents. Instead, they look negatively upon the strong relationship ECSA promotes itself as having with the Ecuadorian state, perceiving it as corruption. While many enjoy ECSA's CSR services, they also identify the services' flaws and view them as a cover up for the underlying corruption.

Many residents of Mirador's impact area perceive a lack of an authority that holds ECSA to the law. In the survey, seven of 16 respondents blamed the Ecuadorian state for ECSA's legal violations, believing that the state doesn't care about the needs of locals but only Project's Mirador tax revenue. They claim that state actors "don't enforce the laws" and "there's not an authority that does things for the community." The violations to national law "are the fault of our government officials because they are the ones that should be fighting for the rights of all Ecuadorians." One respondent stated directly that "the institutions work for ECSA." These responses demonstrate residents' frustration with the perceived corruption of the Ecuadorian state and the absence of an authority that holds ECSA accountable.

Because of this, respondents believe that ECSA can violate laws for its own gain. While seven of 16 respondents blamed the Ecuadorian state for ECSA's legal violations, eight blamed the company itself. Those that blamed ECSA described the company as only "seeking their own well-being" and not caring "about the needs of the community." For some, this explains the perception of why ECSA hires more outsiders than locals: "They don't want to help the local people but rather those from outside so that they don't have to follow the laws." Three respondents specifically mention that the Chinese are stealing the "wealth" or "riches" of Ecuador. This highlights respondents' view of ECSA as a foreign thief who doesn't care about the value residents have in the land and community.

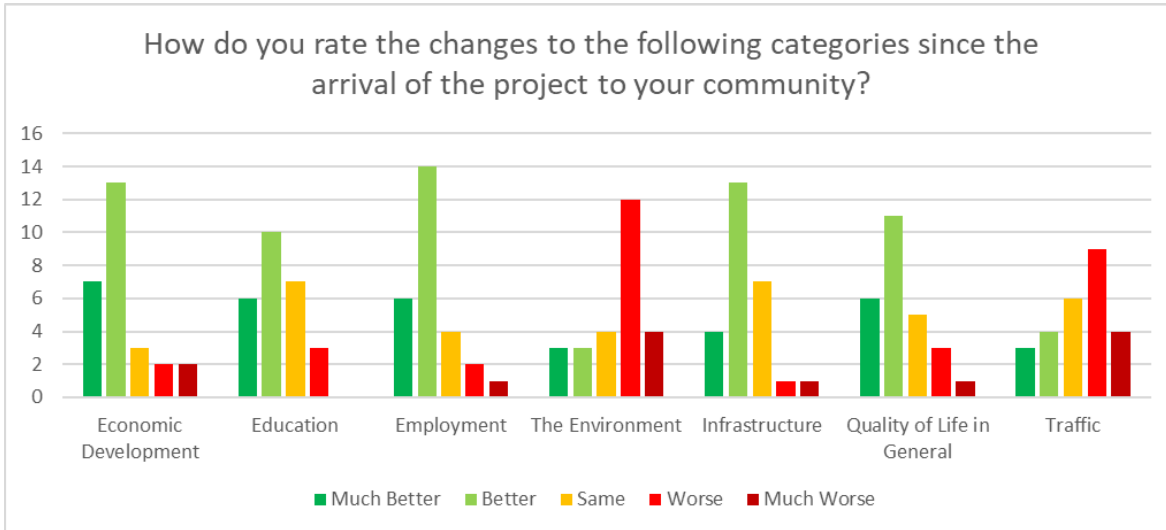


*Figure 11: Survey responses to various changes since the arrival of the Mirador project*

Despite general disdain for ECSA's institutional alliance, residents look rather favorably upon ECSA's development contributions. Survey responses overwhelmingly show that the key driver of their positive perceptions towards ECSA's development contributions is the creation of jobs and its associated economic growth. Of the surveyed residents, 74% (20 of 27) identified both employment and economic development as positively changed since the arrival of the Mirador project, the two most positively rated categories of the seven listed (see Fig. 11). Job provision for locals and economic growth were key arguments of local, regional, and national pro-mining groups that formed in the early days of the project (van Teijlingen and Warnaars 2017, 121). They also compose some of the main responsibilities the company has to the community, according to survey respondents (see Fig. 12). Because "the company helps population development and economic growth, generating jobs for the people for the zone," many residents have a better view of the company. For some, this satisfaction extends to their perception of the Chinese: "the Chinese created sources of employment so I have a better view of them." In addition to employment

and economic development, improvements to education, infrastructure, and quality of life were identified by the majority of respondents.

*Figure 12: Survey responses to the company's responsibilities to the community*

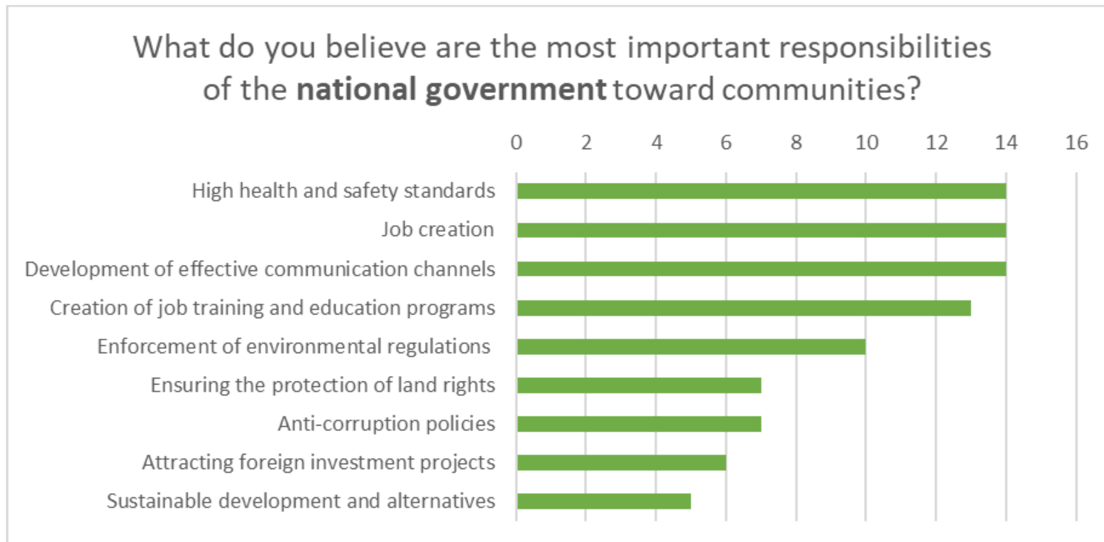


*Figure 13: Survey responses to the government's responsibilities to the community*

When asked how ECSA interacts with the community, a variety of positive things were listed including events, fairs, talks, training, scholarships, and jobs. From positive responses, there was a frequent mention of "capacity building" and "community projects." The former largely referred to "educating the community for our own betterment" and

"talking about how to take care of the environment." Similarly, residents implied that the "many opportunities to carry out projects" served as ways to strengthen their economic status: "they teach us how to develop" and "they changed the ways of doing some things in a good way, new ideas and better projects." One indigenous respondent mentioned that her community had received chickens, guinea pigs, pigs, and fish to raise and consume or sell back to the company for their personnel. This reveals that many residents have seen improvements to their quality of life because of ECSA's CSR. The appreciation of these services is most likely reinforced by the state's historical neglect of spurring development in the area. This is suggested by Figure 13 which shows that the top four responsibilities of the national government towards the community are the same top four responsibilities of the mining project towards the community (shown in Fig. 12).

Nevertheless, some respondents had negative views of ECSA and its state-like services. For example, some see the company as taking advantage of locals' vulnerability. As one respondent says, "the people need to work so the men have opportunities but more the prepared men, those without need." Further, multiple respondents mention that the CSR projects of the mining company don't prioritize or satisfy their basic needs. This dissatisfaction of some with ECSA's CSR reflects how, as a company and not a state actor, ECSA is able to interpret "development" and implement it as it sees fit, rather than accommodating the specific needs of the populace. Other respondents disregard the potential benefits of the development contributions altogether, viewing them as mere compensation for negative impacts: "change exists that isn't very favorable but it helps community development which is considered a priority so that said project continues without 'affecting' the area." This cynical response and others like it indicate distrust of ECSA and the perceived strategies underlying its CSR.

Lastly, a notable concern raised by community members was the lack of socialization from ECSA with many respondents claiming that the company isn't "so helpful like the Canadians before. They don't interact a lot." A common word was "separation," referring to how ECSA appears disconnected from the everyday realities and needs of the local population: "they don't help a lot. They aren't sociable, very separated." Locals perceive ECSA's interactions as primarily transactional with limited engagement beyond material provisions. The absence of socialization efforts has contributed to negative perceptions among locals who feel overlooked and view the ECSA's CSR as primarily self-serving.

*Discussion*

As described, ECSA frames its role with the state and its CSR services as working "together" for the benefit of Ecuadorians. While many residents of the Tundayme parish do appreciate and take advantage of the services, many also recognize flaws and the underlying motive of the services to advance the company's own interests. In this discussion, I argue that ECSA's CSR services allow the company to amass authority, evade true accountability from the law, and reduce the viability of resisting Project Mirador.

The portrayal of ECSA's collaboration with the Ecuadorian state as "working together" is misleading, as it masks the significant degree of autonomy the state has granted ECSA to effectively govern the area. As mentioned, agreements between the company and state actors are always skewed towards ECSA being the main if not sole provider of resources and project execution. Because of the state's largely absent role in this part of the borderland, government officials and inhabitants alike are keen on receiving these state-like services which are backed by the Chinese MNC's extensive resource and knowledge base. By nature, CSR is voluntary, meaning that ECSA can withhold any potential project if conditions are

not favorable. This discourages authorities from setting restrictions or guidelines on ECSA's development services for the fear of missing out on them entirely. The fact that ECSA is "the primary employer and source of economic resources of the parish makes it a powerful actor without equals" (van Teijlingen and Warnaars 2017, 119). Thus, by being handed the keys to local governance, ECSA is able to seek out "community development" in a way that prioritizes its own interests first.

This corporate consolidation of power works against residents by leaving them without an authority figure that enforces the law. Survey responses overwhelmingly show this with many explaining that ECSA commits illegal acts 1) because of its greed and 2) because "the authorities don't enforce the laws." The state's increasing reliance on ECSA's CSR services leads it to ignore violations of environmental, labor, mining, and constitutional laws, allowing ECSA to operate with minimal concern for legal consequences. This confirms previous scholarly findings that CSR weakens government oversight and distances the political establishment from their own social base (Akpan 2006; Burchardt and Deitz 2014).

ECSA's amassed authority reduces residents' autonomy over their community. For example, seven respondents mentioned that the national government should be controlling or altogether stopping immigration into Tundayme from other provinces and countries (specifically Venezuela, Colombia, and China). Many credited these migrants with stealing their jobs and bringing crime to the area. While increases in immigration and crime do frequently occur as a result of mining projects (Irwin and Gallagher 2013; Petkova et al. 2014), these concerns more generally reveal the presence of an unwanted change to the social fabric and the perception that the community is no longer capable of controlling their own future. Furthermore, ECSA's narrow definition of "community development" as CSR projects fails to resonate with residents, whose concept of development encompasses deeper

cultural and social values. As Akpan (2006) found, "for local residents, community development meant more than simply 'projects'...[but] it meant, as some respondents put it, 'everything we cherish, everything that gives us a sense of worth as a community'" (233-234). The community values of Tundayme residents go far deeper than economic growth, but due to ECSA's consolidation of power, residents feel that there is no authority left to support their multidimensional needs.

These present-day perceptions of abandonment reflect the region's past, marked by exploitation and neglect by the Ecuadorian state. Historically, the state has given attention to the Cordillera del Cóndor area only when it has served its own interests, whether they be motives to Christianize the inhabitants or to protect the mineral-rich land from the country's southern neighbor (Riofrancos 2017). In the early stages of Project Mirador, the state forced some Colono and Shuar communities to sell their land to the state. The prices did not reflect the communities' true value of the land which is based on their "articulations of roots, historical struggles, memories, spirits, dignity, and identity that give meaning to life" (van Teijlingen and Warnaars 2017, 138). This is especially true considering the Colonos were originally inhabitants of the Sierra relocated to the Cordillera del Cóndor for the state's land reform regime of the 1960s and 1970s (Vela-Almeida 2020). They alongside the Shuar inhabitants fought against Peru in the Paquisha and Cenepa Wars, and this shared experience of "'national heroism' became impregnated in the imagination of them as Ecuadorian citizens protecting national sovereignty" (ibid, 1117). Later, this shared experience came to include "a sense of negligence by the national government" as they reaped no reward from the wars in which they fought (van Teijlingen and Warnaars 2017, 116).

Due to this history of neglect and a lack of economic development in the region, ECSA is able to foster dependency on its state-like services. It is almost impossible for

residents to avoid certain aspects of ECSA's CSR such as roads, bridges, health centers, police stations, and schools—emphasizing the power of ECSA to permanently alter the physical as well as social landscape of the project area. However, other projects are more specific to certain groups such as in 2020 when ECSA gave internet connection to eight local indigenous communities for their children to be able to access online education (October 26th). These kinds of projects, along with training and capacity-building initiatives, rely heavily on cooperation with corporate interests.

The ability of ECSA to define "community development" and be selective of its recipients enables the company to use CSR as a divide-and-conquer tactic. This has been seen throughout the history of the Mirador project, specifically with indigenous groups. Despite early anti-mining unity by both Colonos and Shuar inhabitants, each community one by one began to establish relationships with the company, get members employed, and receive development assistance. This is evident by the leader of the Valle de Quimi Colono community who said that the community "broke its relation a little with the company but is intending to better it" despite describing the company's greedy, problematic behavior. As these indigenous groups have begun turning from resistance to cooperation, there is a diminished ability of the remaining opposition groups to make a significant impact on the future of the Mirador project. This has contributed to the lack of a strong, local opposition front and highlights the political and economic powers ECSA has to passively coerce individuals and groups to align with the interests of the company.

In a more active sense, state actors have worked in the mutual interest of themselves and the company by weaponizing modernization discourse to compel residents to comply with the Mirador project. For example, those local residents who "stop believing in the announced promises or…fear the change that this 'modernization' implies" were considered

by Correa and others who share his perspective on extractivism as "'stone throwers,' people informed and guided by actors of global civil society and radical, opportunistic environmentalism" (Leifsen and Hogan 2017, 233). This demonization of Project Mirador's critics is reproduced by local residents themselves. Specifically, local indigenous persons have been chastised for their own resistance or the resistance of other members of their indigenous community (Fernández-Salvador 2017, 160; Novik 2023). This narrative reproduction was coined by Wilson Akpan as "local cooptation of corporate-imposed parameters of difference," and it serves as an example of CSR's divisive nature (2006, 235). In Akpan's study of CSR in Nigeria's oil province, he found that this division can be long-lasting and can fuel ethnic conflict.

The use of modernization discourse by the Ecuadorian state to justify its transformation of inhabitants' way of life is not a new practice. During the recolonization of the area beginning in the 1960s, "the government hoped that the missionaries would bring an education that would transform [the Shuar] into Ecuadorian citizens" (Warnaars and van Teijlingen 2017, 78). Beyond education, this forced assimilation of the Shuar into a "national" identity—defined by a mestizo system—included the forced adoption of a sedentary lifestyle under the threat that if they did not comply, everything would be taken from them (Warnaars and van Teijlingen 2017). This echoes the forced eviction of Colono and Shuar communities within the last decade. During recolonization, there were "mainly two power forces who motivated the attempts to delimit, control, and construct a sociopolitical space: the state and the Church…in the Amazon the apparent absence of one (the State) gave space for the prosperity of the other (the Church)" (Warnaars and van Teijlingen 2017, 79). This dynamic of the Ecuadorian state giving the task of "modernizing" the inhabitants of the Cordillera del Cóndor area to another actor is apparent today with

ECSA. The state's absence allows it to absolve itself from responsibility for development and accountability for wrongdoing. This lack of a state authority permits ESCA to do what it must to protect the operations of Project Mirador, including the use of CSR to subordinate residents to corporate needs, all justified for the benefit of Ecuadorian society.

*Conclusion*

In summary, ECSA derives its authority from state actors who allow the project of "modernization" to be carried out by ECSA. Its CSR regime constitutes a host of state-like services, upon which the community now relies. Local residents are frustrated at the lack of the company's accountability under the law yet are denied the right to criticize the company due to their need for its development programs, highlighting the ability of CSR to capitalize on the area's historical neglect. Further, CSR is designed to first serve the interest of the company and thus does not effectively address the holistic needs of the community—including the needs that arise from negative project impacts and the needs based on the community's social and cultural values. Because ECSA is the main figure of economic and political authority and subsequently can define corporate-community relations, the system of autonomous democracy is undermined. This shows that CSR, because of its profit motive, doesn't adequately substitute for democratic government systems nor their services.

This case study on the Mirador mega-mine and ECSA's CSR regime reveals how harmful extractive MNCs can be to communities of impact yet simultaneously why resistance to these projects often fails. As the extractive sectors grow in many Latin American economies, it is important to understand how MNCs use CSR for their own benefit. While providing some beneficial services to communities of impact, CSR also divides and marginalizes groups to advance corporate profits and the imperative for growth.

# CONCLUSION

In 2012, inhabitants of the Mirador project area marched 435 miles from El Pangui to Quito to protest the project and fight for "water, life, and dignity of indigenous peoples." (Harris 2022). For the next few years, resistance would remain strong as ECSA continued to dispossess indigenous peoples of their land and safeguard the future of its mining project. However, local opposition has been relatively quiet in the fast few years besides legal battles which have been lost or still waiting to be resolved.[9] Recent media coverage has not highlighted resistance but the development benefits that ECSA has delivered to the local community (Efe 2023). Because of this apparent shift in perceptions of the project, I was interested in learning about local opinions and how ECSA seemingly overcame resistance.

Subsequently, I asked the following research questions: what are the strategies used by ESCA to construct corporate-community relations, and what are the corporate-community relations that have emerged through Chinese investment in Ecuador's extractive industry? This study argues that ECSA uses a divide-and-conquer approach to co-opt support for the project and negate resistance. ECSA's CSR regime has defined corporate-community relations, and its extensive array of government-like services covertly compensates for negative impacts and instills a deep-rooted dependency on the company for community well-being. While still critical of the company and its impacts, especially environmental harms, locals have given up on organized resistance. Instead, they have largely accepted the dominance of ECSA's authority in order to receive development assistance that the state has historically neglected to provide them. Thus, ECSA's CSR has been "successful" for the company at protecting its mining operations while still not entirely satisfying the residents: fostering tension, bitterness, and social fragmentation that largely goes unspoken.

There are several limitations to this research study. First, the small sample size of the survey (N = 30) limits the validity of the data and the conclusions drawn from it, possibly lacking perspectives from other community members. Specifically, the lack of a significant number of indigenous respondents (N = 5) complicates my generalization of their perspectives. This is especially true since they were members of different indigenous communities, each with a distinct composition, history, set of values, and relationship with ECSA. Further, the survey was conducted utilizing a convenience sampling method, and due to the controversy surrounding the project, many Tundayme residents refused to even take my survey. Subsequently, the survey findings should not be assumed as perfectly representative of the local population.

Despite these limitations, this thesis makes several important contributions to scholarship. First, no field work-based studies have been conducted or published on Project Mirador since mining production officially began in 2019.[10] Thus, this study gives voice to community residents and their on-the-ground experience with ECSA's corporate-community relations strategies. It reveals that despite a lack of organized resistance, Tundayme residents harbor varying degrees of bitterness towards the company. This study also confirms the heterogeneity of local perspectives towards Project Mirador both between and within groups. The mining operation has benefited and disadvantaged local residents, and these varied outcomes highlight the complex dynamics that underpin locals' views towards ECSA.

Second, this study shows the divide-and-conquer nature of CSR in the mining industry, affirming the conclusions of previous scholarship. In the case of the Mirador project, CSR has been used to consolidate corporate power, induce competition for state-like services, and negate the viability of evidence-based resistance. The voluntary nature of ECSA's CSR regime allows it to pick and choose who benefits from the project and in what

ways, fostering acceptance and compliance with ECSA's objectives over time. Despite national resistance to mega-projects led by indigenous and environmental advocates, indigenous groups in the Mirador impact area have become less outwardly critical of the mining project in fear of losing out on its benefits. This confirms Hale's concept of the "indio permitido" as CSR is being used by the MNC to compel indigenous individuals and groups to act in accordance with globalized capitalism. Like in the past, the inhabitants of the Cordillera del Cóndor have been co-opted to fulfill the political and economic goals of the Ecuadorian state, being told it makes them "national patriots."

Thirdly, this research project contributes to scholarship on Ecuador's political and economic model. This case study reveals how the state has relinquished a significant degree of governance to foreign corporations like ECSA in order to pursue "modernization." The recent development of robust CSR regimes has helped enable this transfer of developmental responsibilities, allowing MNCs to continue taking advantage of developing countries and their dependence on raw materials. In this way, this study yields the similar conclusion of previous literature that CSR weakens democratic systems and leads to the further entanglement of Latin American economies in the web of transnational capital.

Further, this thesis adds to existing scholarship on China's involvement in Latin America. Many inhabitants of Project Mirador's impact area now have worse perceptions of the Chinese and think the Chinese company is "stealing the riches of Ecuador." China's poor reputation of labor abuses and environmental degradation encourage resistance to Chinese mega-projects. Resistance, mega-project disasters, and corruption controversies are destabilizing the future of Chinese investment in Ecuador (Peng 2023). This generates more uncertainty for Ecuador's foreign relations and economic model as the country is "facing a debt with China that has become onerous due to declining petroleum prices" (Amar et al.

2023, 13). As China continues to grow its presence in the region, it is important to study the sociopolitical effects of Chinese investment and how CSR helps China to safeguard its expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative.

*Figure 14: The Quimi tailing dam pond adjacent to the Quimi River*

Lastly, studies on CSR like this are critical for designing better means of corporate accountability and preventing disasters. In 2019, the tailing ponds at the Córrego de Feijão mine in Brazil burst, flooding the local city in under 10 seconds and killing at least 270 (Romero 2020). Investigators found that the mine's executives had systematically hidden evidence from the authorities and the public, allowing warning signs to go undetected. That same year in Ecuador, the Chinese Coca Codo Sinclair dam's erosion of the riverbed led to the rupture of three oil pipelines (Vásconez 2023; Loaiza 2021). Correa's own former energy minister claimed that the dam's failures were caused by "a lack of serious and responsible studies" (Miranda 2019). According to an environmental nonprofit, the Quimi and Tundayme dams that hold back chemical and metal-ridden wastewater at Project Mirador are at severe risk of collapsing with the potential to kill hundreds (Emerman and Chambers 2022).

These examples underscore how the corporate science of mega-projects in Latin America risks lives and significant pollution. As shown, scientific uncertainty is not incorporated into the modern development model, which prioritizes growth above all else. As Bordón argues, science should be institutionally democratized "to process environmental conflicts raised by the negative evaluation of risk as unforeseen or unwanted effects of 'progress' (2022, 66). Thus, future research on CSR is important for understanding how to promote "technical democracy," hold extractive corporations accountable, and prevent environmental disasters. Recent referendums in Ecuador show that resistance to oil and mining projects is strong, and limiting the ability of CSR to be weaponized against local opposition could allow for a more grassroots response to Latin American extractivism.

## ENDNOTES

[1] Since independence, Ecuador and Peru have disputed claims over territory in the Amazon rainforest, marked by five major armed conflicts: the Gran Colombia–Peru War (1828-1829), the Ecuadorian–Peruvian War (1857–1860), the second Ecuadorian–Peruvian War (1941), the Paquisha War (1981), and the Cenepa War (1995). These conflicts have all involved the Cordillera del Cóndor mountain range, an area with rich biodiversity (constituting part of the world's most biodiverse hotspot) and that now marks the border between the two South American countries (Conservation International 2023). After the latest armed conflict, international organizations such as Conversation International took advantage of the moment and contributed to the establishment of ecological protection zones, commonly referred to as "peace parks," on both sides of the border including El Cóndor Binational Park, El Cóndor-Kutukú Conservation Corridor, and El Cóndor Biosphere Reserve (Warnaars and van Teijlingen 2017).

[2] The 2009 mining reforms made the project more enticing to the Chinese consortium as it did not require the heavily debated provision which would require firms to obtain the prior and informed consent of affected communities (Quiliconi and Rodriguez Vasco 2021).

[3] Under Canadian ownership, ECSA managed the Mirador project from 1999 (a year after the Cenepa War peace treaty) until 2010. As a junior mining company, it was mainly dedicated to exploration and identification of deposits but no large-scale exploitation (Leifsen et al. 2017). During the first half of Canadian ownership, ECSA faced little opposition from locals as the absence of the Ecuadorian state and its public services in the area made residents supportive of new benefits that the mining project would bring (Quiliconi and Rodriguez Vasco 2021, 10-11).

[4] Upon adoption of the 2008 Constitution, Ecuador became the first country in the world to provide constitutionally protected rights to nature thanks to indigenous and environmental advocates. They are defined using the Andean deity "Pachamama" or "Mother Earth" which includes all of nature—even beyond the nation's borders. The constitutional protections guarantee nature its integrity as an ecosystem, its ability to regenerate its life cycles, and its right to be restored if damaged (Kauffman and Martin 2018, 49; Espinosa 2015).

[5] Many institutional, social, and civil groups oppose the voluntary and self-regulatory nature of CSR yet struggle to implement a regulatory regime that still incentivizes the development of the mining industry and its subsequent economic benefits (Mutti et al. 2012). A few scholars argue in favor of CSR's voluntary nature, citing efficient markets as the reason corporations are able to contribute to the public good (Henderson 2001). Others instead advocate for a stronger legal regime to govern CSR as the only form to make corporations more honest and environmentally and socially conscious (Pendleton et al. 2004). These scholars contend that this will transform CSR from being solely a "branch of PR" to corporate social accountability (Pendleton et al. 2004).

[6] Since the beginning of ECSA's Instagram account, posts have given fun facts about copper and the mineral's importance to the ecological transition. These include its importance to electric vehicles, solar panels, and the overall aim to reduce "polluting emissions into the environment" (December 28th, 2020). These posts are intended to detract from the emissions and environmental degradation that result from the ore's extraction and instead frame the Mirador project as contributing to societal progress and sustainable development.

[7] Yanúa has significantly fewer ECSA employees than the other communities surveyed because of bad employment experiences with Corriente Resources in the 2000s (Fernández-Salvador 2017).

[8] ECSA's subtle motive for security investment was evidenced when in 2015 both police and private security were used to evict the residents of the San Marcos community who refused to sell their land to the mining company (Novik 2023). Further, during my own research trip, I was told that it was illegal to take photos of the project even from afar and that if I did, my phone would be taken.

[9] At least six lawsuits have been filed against the Mirador project from 2013 to 2019. Most of the lawsuits have been filed in domestic courts against ECSA, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Natural Resources, among others (Almeida Albuja v. Narvaez 2013; Hui 2019). These domestic cases have been brought on the basis of legal provisions such as the constitutional rights of nature, indigenous right to free and prior consent, and land rights, yet all of these cases have been lost (ibid). The only active case is the case before the Inter-American Court on Human Rights (IACHR). In 2013, a member of the Yanúa-Kim indigenous community filed a case against the Mirador project to the IACHR which was received in March of 2022 and still awaits further judgment (Alvarado 2022).

[10] This study is also the first to do field work on the Mirador project after the COVID-19 pandemic. I speculate that the Chinese identity of the mining conglomerate as well as the company's desire to continue operations encouraged ECSA's swift deployment of healthcare resources and services. Undoubtedly, the uncertainty of the pandemic contributed to the local populace's acceptance of ECSA's health CSR and the overall mining operation though the exact degree to which remains unknown due to my lack of COVID-related survey data.

**APPENDIX**

Appendix A: Table of Survey Sample Demographics

**Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents**

| | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|
| **Sex** | | |
| Female | 13 | 43 |
| Male | 17 | 57 |
| **Age** | | |
| 20-28 | 7 | 23 |
| 29-35 | 8 | 27 |
| 36-49 | 8 | 27 |
| 50-68 | 7 | 23 |
| **Ethnicity** | | |
| Afro-Ecuadorian | 1 | 3 |
| Indigenous | 5 | 17 |
| Mestizo | 24 | 80 |
| **Origin** | | |
| Zamora Chinchipe province | 12 | 41 |
| Another province of Ecuador | 17 | 59 |
| Another country | 0 | 0 |

Appendix B: Full Survey Questionnaire (English version)

**Survey Questionnaire**
**Project Title: Chinese Mining and Community Relations in Southern Ecuador**
**Investigator: Hayden Pierce, University of Mississippi**

**Age:**
1. How old are you? ____ (in years)

**Sex:**
2. Sex
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

**Place of birth:**
3. What country were you born in?
- ☐ Ecuador:

What region of Ecuador were you born in? ______________________________________
- ☐ Another country:

In what country? ____________________________________________________________

**Occupation:**
4. What is your usual occupation?
Please, describe the type of occupation you do. What kind of activities do you do in this job? Write as much detail as possible.
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

**Ethnicity:**
5.a. How do you identify yourself according to your culture and customs?
- ☐ Indigenous
- ☐ Afro-Ecuadorian or Afro-descendant
- ☐ Black
- ☐ Mulatto
- ☐ Montubia
- ☐ Mestizo
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other: _________________

5.b. If you selected "indigenous," what is the nationality that you identify with?
- ☐ A'icofan
- ☐ Achuar
- ☐ Andwa
- ☐ Awa
- ☐ Chachi
- ☐ Epera Siapidaara

☐ Kichwa
☐ Sapara
☐ Shiwiar
☐ Shuar
☐ Siekopaai
☐ Siona
☐ Tsa'chila
☐ Waorani

6. On a scale from one to ten (one being the lowest and ten being the highest), how would you rate your satisfaction with the Mirador mining project? (*circle one*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. How would you best categorize the changes to each of the following categories since the project's arrival to your community: (*circle one for each category*)

| | |
|---|---|
| Economic development | much worse - worse - the same - better - much better |
| Education | much worse - worse - the same - better - much better |
| Employment | much worse - worse - the same - better - much better |
| Environment | much worse - worse - the same - better - much better |
| Infrastructure | much worse - worse - the same - better - much better |
| Overall quality of life | much worse - worse - the same - better - much better |
| Traffic | much worse - worse - the same - better - much better |

8. On a scale from one to ten (one being the lowest and ten being the highest), how well does the company listen and respond to community concerns? (*circle one*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. In a few sentences, please describe how the company interacts with the local community.

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

10. What, if any, environmental problems have resulted from the mining operations? (*select all that apply*)

- ☐ Air pollution
- ☐ Deforestation
- ☐ Loss of biodiversity
- ☐ Noise pollution
- ☐ Soil erosion
- ☐ Water contamination
- ☐ Water scarcity
- ☐ No environmental problems
- ☐ Other: ___________________

11.a. To your knowledge, have there been any violations to Ecuadorian environmental laws? How many and how severe?

________________________________________________________________________________

11.b. To your knowledge, have there been any violations to Ecuadorian labor laws? How many and how severe?

________________________________________________________________________________

11.c. In your opinion, why have these violations occurred/not occurred?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

12. What do you believe are the most important responsibilities of the mining operation toward communities? (*select all that apply*)

- ☐ Anti-corruption policies
- ☐ Contribution to small and medium sized enterprises
- ☐ Creation of job training programs
- ☐ Creation of job training and education programs
- ☐ Development of local infrastructure
- ☐ Effective communication and transparency
- ☐ Environmental protection and regulation
- ☐ High health and safety standards
- ☐ Payment of taxes and royalties
- ☐ Provision of employment
- ☐ Sustainable development and alternatives
- ☐ Other/s: _________________
- ☐ None of the above

13. What do you believe are the most important responsibilities of the national government toward communities? (*select all that apply*)

- ☐ Anti-corruption policies
- ☐ Attracting foreign investment projects
- ☐ Creation of job training and education programs
- ☐ Development of effective communication channels
- ☐ Enforcement of environmental regulations
- ☐ Ensuring the protection of land rights
- ☐ High health and safety standards
- ☐ Job creation
- ☐ Sustainable development and alternatives
- ☐ Other/s: ___________________
- ☐ None of the above

14. How has the mining operation affected men and their job opportunities?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

15. How has the mining operation affected women and their job opportunities?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

16. Do you know if there is informal mining in the canton? How does it impact the community?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

17. In your opinion, is the government of China very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or do you not have an opinion? (*select one*)

☐ Very trustworthy
☐ Somewhat trustworthy
☐ Not very trustworthy
☐ No opinion

18. On a scale from one to ten (one being the lowest and ten being the highest), how favorably do you view Chinese involvement in Ecuador's development? (*circle one*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

19. In a few sentences, please describe how the Mirador mining project has changed your view of the Chinese, if at all.

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

Appendix C: Hashtag Count Across ECSA's Instagram Captions

| Orginal Hashtag (#) | Hashtag in English | Count |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ecsa | ecsa | 690 |
| mineríaconresponsabilidad | miningwithresponsibility | 670 |
| minamirador | miradormine | 665 |
| miradorestácontigo | miradoriswithyou | 143 |
| mineríaparaeldesarrollo | miningfordevelopment | 118 |
| ofertalaboral | joboffer | 89 |
| tundayme | tundayme | 86 |
| elpangui | elpangui | 71 |
| convocatoria | announcement | 61 |
| mineríaesdesarrollo | miningisdevelopment | 53 |
| zamorachinchipe | zamorachinchipe | 40 |
| mineríaresponsable | responsiblemining | 38 |
| proyectomirador | miradorproject | 38 |
| solidariosconecuador | solidaritywithecuador | 36 |
| ecuador | ecuador | 12 |

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