

Democracy for the Indigenous Populations of Latin America

Introduction

Much of the seminal work on democratization considers national populations homogeneously. While there are benefits to doing so, this practice often results in scholars glossing over more individualized considerations of how transitions and consolidation affect specific subsets of a nation's population. In particular, they frequently fail to address the impact of these processes on minority groups. While all minority groups likely deserve greater scholarly attention, this essay focuses on the relationship between democratization and the indigenous populations of select Latin American countries – Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, and Guatemala. It principally explores what democratic governance has meant for indigenous peoples and the contemporary political demands of organized indigenous interests. In short, it asks three questions: How have indigenous people politicized within democratic systems? How do they participate and what are their demands? And, how much political power do they have?

Answering these questions is important not only for better understanding Latin America's indigenous communities, but also for the democratization scholarship more broadly. Deborah Yashar argues, "While Latin American countries have largely made the transition to democracy, it would be difficult to argue that these regimes – and the states and societies that undergird them – are consolidated in any meaningful sense of the word."¹ The basis for her assertion is that their failure to "accommodate plural identities, political units, and administrative hegemony" has resulted in lasting political conflict that must be resolved before classifying these regimes as consolidated. Of course, this indicates a stricter definition of consolidation than that employed by other scholars that look for procedural milestones such as subsequent, peaceful transitions of power.² Nonetheless, the following discussion thus contributes to a larger debate in the political science scholarship as to whether democracy is consolidated if it is not democratic for all. Terry Lynn Karl writes, "regime consolidation occurs when contending social classes and political groups come to accept some set of formal rules or informal understanding that determine 'who gets what, where, when, and how' from politics."³ This essay will show that at least one of the contending groups in several Latin American countries – indigenous peoples – have seemingly yet to accept the distributional outcomes of the region's democratic regimes. With that said, any proponent of more substantive definitions of consolidation must accordingly approach the classification of these cases with pause, as democracy for the majority certainly should not be understood as democracy for all.

¹ Deborah Yashar, "Democracy, Indigenous Movements, and Postliberal Challenge in Latin America," *World Politics* 52, no. 1 (October 1999): 97.

² Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

³ Terry Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 1 (October 1990): 5.

Case Selection

A vast majority of Latin America's indigenous peoples live in Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia.⁴ According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico is home to the largest number of indigenous people (17 million in 2010), and Bolivia has the highest population density of indigenous people, with this population accounting for a reported 62.2% of the nation's total. Indigenous people also comprise significant portions of the population in Guatemala (41.1%) and Peru (24%).⁵ Compared to the other cases, the ECLAC reports Ecuador has a smaller proportion of indigenous people (7%), but when *mestizos* – people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry – are included, its indigenous population, too, is substantial. Ecuador is also included in this study because it remains one of the few Latin American countries where indigenous people have successfully changed policy through political organization. In fact, some scholars distinguish the numerous social movements led by The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE – *La Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*) in the 1990s as a key impetus for the political mobilization of indigenous peoples elsewhere in Latin America.⁶

This essay will primarily discuss Ecuador and Bolivia as examples of countries where indigenous communities are making progress, Peru as an example of where they have failed, and Mexico as an example somewhere in between. Guatemala is referenced throughout, but given that it just recently returned to democracy after a 36-year civil war, it is hardly comparable to the other nations. Nonetheless, given its large indigenous population, it should still be included in any discourse on the state of Latin America's indigenous people. As will be detailed throughout this essay, these five countries provide an interesting contrast that demonstrates the range of political outcomes possible for indigenous people.

The introduction of the population data above also raises the important question: Who is indigenous? Perhaps surprisingly, few scholars who write about indigenous populations address this question directly. One who does, however, is Rachel Sieder, who edited a widely cited work on indigenous people and democracy in Latin America. According to Sieder, there are three broad criteria: "self-definition as a person belonging to an indigenous community, subordination to dominant society, and historical continuity with pre-colonial societies. Indigenous identity," she says, "is linked to a prevailing sense of cultural difference and to discrimination by dominant society."⁷ In terms of their demographics, Sieder notes that, on average, "indigenous people are among the poorest sectors of Latin American society," and their "livelihoods [primarily] remain dependent on access to

⁴ Deborah Yashar, "Indigenous Protest and Democracy in Latin America," in *Constructing Democratic Governance: Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s, Themes and Issues*, ed. Jorge I. Domínguez and Abraham Lowenthal (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 92.

⁵ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Indigenous Peoples in Latin America," September 2014.

⁶ James Bowen, "Multicultural Market Democracy: Elites and Indigenous Movements in Contemporary Ecuador," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 43, no. 3 (August 2011): 451.

⁷ Rachel Sieder, *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 2.

land.”⁸ Thus, indigenous people represent some of the most vulnerable people in many Latin American countries. This makes discussing and understanding their political power (or lack thereof) all the more important.

A full historical analysis of each country’s individual political development is beyond the scope of this essay. An important note about the cases as a whole, however, is these countries exist in what were once the strongholds of the Mayan and Incan civilizations prior to European colonization. Some scholars argue that the large labor pool encountered by the Spanish conquistadors in these regions led to vastly different trajectories of economic and political development than observed elsewhere. Such arguments claim that a large population of native labor and favorable conditions for large-scale resource extraction incentivized the Spanish to institutionalize systems of extreme inequity in these regions of their empire more so than in others (e.g., the Southern cone).⁹ While not the focus of this article, such arguments are important to acknowledge as they help explain some of the reasons why inequality and social justice are such important topics for the modern, democratic states in these regions to address.

History of Indigenous Politicization

To begin, it is necessary to note that the politicization of indigenous interests as indigenous interests remains a relatively new part of Latin American politics. Until the 1990s, Latin American democracies effectively promoted the cultural assimilation of indigenous communities under the guise of national unity, and history shows they were quite successful in diminishing, or at least repressing, a collective indigenous identity until recently. Most scholars agree that they accomplished this by promoting a “*campesino*” – peasant agricultural worker – identity among indigenous people,¹⁰ and that the bulk of this work was carried out during the populist reforms that swept through many Latin American countries during the mid-1900s. As a part of these reforms, national leaders developed more programs designed to incorporate peasant communities into the state through the introduction of targeted assistance programs and the creation of formal channels for the economically disadvantaged to access the state. By restricting the use of these services to peasants, however, it is argued that the state was able to “oblige Indians to define themselves as peasants, particularly if they hoped to gain access to state resources.”¹¹ This, then, diminished sentiments of ethnic or cultural autonomy as indigenous people were increasingly identifying, at least politically, among larger collectives based on their shared economic or occupational characteristics.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kenneth Sokoloff and Stanley Engerman, “Institutions, Factor Endowments, and Paths of Development in the New World,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14, no. 3 (2000): 217-232.

¹⁰ Jean Jackson and Kay Warren, “Indigenous Movements in Latin America, 1992-2004: Controversies, Ironies, New Directions,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (October 2004): 551.

¹¹ Deborah Yashar, “Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 1 (October 1998): 24.

Importantly, this means that for most of the last century, indigenous people were unlikely to consider what democracy meant for them culturally. Instead, they largely viewed politics through a socioeconomic lens that focused only upon issues like income inequality. This allowed them to rely on other organizations (e.g. labor unions) to address political issues for them. Some scholars predicted this adherence to a larger group identity was the only way for indigenous people to enter politics,¹² but history has shown that to be untrue. In fact, the literature is quite clear that “Latin American Indians entered national politics meaningfully in the 1990s [only] by politicizing ethnic identity.”¹³

The exact impetus for “re-indigenization” in the 1990s remains debated. In all likelihood, there was a confluence of many factors at play, but two of the most important, in general terms, were changing social and economic conditions in the 1980s and ‘90s. Beginning with changes in social conditions, Alyson Brysk writes about the influence of a burgeoning number of transnational NGOs operating in Latin America during in the early 1990s. These organizations supported a variety of social causes (human rights, women’s rights, environmentalism) that eventually grew to include indigenous rights as “many nongovernmental organizations that specialize in development or human rights came to see indigenous peoples as clients.”¹⁴ Why this happened in the 1990s, specifically, is unclear, but it is argued that under the stewardship of these organized groups, activist leaders in the indigenous community both began to understand their interests to be distinct from those of the peasantry and to develop the requisite skills needed to organize and lead large-scale social movements.¹⁵

In addition to the importance of NGOs, Deborah Yashar notes that an increasingly active Catholic Church may have also contributed to re-indigenization in the 1990s. In many Latin American countries, she writes that the Church provided “the means of communication, locus of interaction, and literacy skills that linked one [indigenous] community to another.”¹⁶ These connections helped the numerous indigenous communities in some countries unite in new ways, which facilitated the spread of greater communal identification and provided an arena for developing a more unified discourse about the political demands of indigenous peoples. Of course, the provision and maintenance of networks alone did not directly politicize them, but when calls for activism did come, the presence and strength of these networks, Yashar argues, helps explain the variability in successful outcomes detailed below.

Importantly, helping indigenous people to mobilize was likely not an intended outcome of the Church’s increasingly active role with indigenous communities. Although his article is limited to Mexico, Guillermo Trejo offers one explanation for the reason that “Catholic authorities became major promoters of economic

¹² Martin Needler, *Latin American Politics in Perspective* (Princeton: Van Norstrand, 1967).

¹³ Donna Van Cott, “Party System Development and Indigenous Populations in Latin America: The Bolivian Case,” *Party Politics* 6, no. 2 (April 2000): 156.

¹⁴ Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Deborah Yasahr, “Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 1 (October 1998): 37.

cooperatives, social movements, and ideological frames that served Indian peasants to launch protest movements for material redistribution and ethnocultural rights.”¹⁷ Using both a quantitative analysis and three qualitative case studies, Trejo concludes that altruism was, indeed, not the principal factor. Instead, he identifies a Protestant threat in that late 1900s that was emerging in what were once reliably Catholic strongholds throughout Mexico. The introduction and subsequent spread of “religious competition,” he argues, “empowered indigenous Catholic parishioners to demand a new ‘religious contract’ by which Catholic authorities would serve their interests for the first time in centuries.”¹⁸ Other scholars have written extensively about the causes and outcomes of religious competition in Latin America,¹⁹ but the key point of this discussion is to note that while the Catholic Church undoubtedly helped indigenous communities politicize, its doing so was more the result of an economic calculus in fending off potential religious alternatives than anything else. Thus, in terms of social forces, the role NGOs played was intentional, but the role the Church played was coincidental.

The second influence driving re-indigenization that is detailed by a number of scholars is principally economic. More specifically, a neoliberal turn throughout most of Latin America in the 1990s. Reeling from recessions in the 1980s, many Latin American countries faced depressed domestic revenue, high foreign debt, and severe trade imbalance. These conditions necessitated most of them to seek external assistance, which exposed them to increased pressure from organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to “adopt neoliberal reforms to promote democratization, economic liberalization and centralization.”²⁰ According to Jackson and Warren, the adoption of such reforms required Latin American states to promote a restructuring of civil society “to take up the slack resulting from decreases in social services” required by the recommended austerity programs.²¹ This meant that as the government pulled back on state-sponsored programs to promote the principles of free market capitalism, it subsequently called for communities to come together and help their own in replacement of the lost social services. This helped to reinvigorate indigenous peoples’ sense of communal identity. According to Jackson and Warren, “Pressure from bodies like the United Nations has resulted in states recognizing rights to difference, which allows indigenous activists and groups to make claims that enlist discourse about tradition and community that resonate with neoliberal discourses on community solidarity and social capital.”²² Given their previous identification with peasants at large, this encouragement of solidarity resulted in a shift toward greater ethnic organization within some countries.

¹⁷ Guillermo Trejo, “Religious Competition and Ethnic Mobilization in Latin America: Why the Catholic Church promotes Indigenous Movements in Mexico,” *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 3 (August 2009): 340.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ For a full discussion of religious competition see: Anthony Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁰ Jean Jackson and Kay B. Warren, “Indigenous Movements in Latin America, 1992-2004: Controversies, Ironies, New Directions,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (October 2004): 552.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Like Jackson and Warren, Yashar also notes the importance of neoliberal reforms in the process of re-indigenization. Concerning the effects of neoliberalism on indigenous peoples, Yashar writes:

Federations have lost political and social leverage throughout the region, and with this Indians have lost their formal ties to the state. The shift has also informed the adoption of stabilization and structural adjustment policies that have drastically cut back social services and goods that ostensibly were designed to secure a basic social standard of living for citizens. Most dramatically for Indians, states have privatized land markets, liberalized agricultural prices, eliminated agricultural subsidies, and diminished credit programs.²³

Of course, it is worth noting that there is no reason to believe that the IMF or World Bank intentionally marginalized indigenous populations with the neoliberal policies they promoted, but the evidence presented by the scholars here clearly indicates how the adoption of such policies antagonized indigenous communities throughout Latin America. Given the loss of both their principle contact points to the state and the protections for their primary source of livelihood – agriculture – it is unsurprising that Latin American countries experienced a surge of indigenous unrest at the turn of the century.

While not the same in all countries, several of the selected cases experienced indigenous *levantamientos* – uprisings – in response to the adoption of neoliberal economic policies. Perhaps most famous were the widespread mobilizations in Ecuador led by CONAIE in June, 1990. Demanding “resolution of land conflicts, an end to the exploitation of Indians, a decrease in the cost of living,” and more, local activists arranged a national mobilization of indigenous people from all of Ecuador’s 14 indigenous populations on a scale unlike any the country had previously experienced.²⁴ The uprising included marches, public trials, traffic obstruction, and occupation of town squares and key cultural sites. Its principal demand was to open negotiations with the federal government on a platform of 12 specified issues. Notably, these issues were a mixture of those specific to indigenous populations (e.g., bilingual and bicultural education) and those affecting low-income Ecuadorians of all backgrounds (e.g. affordable healthcare), so the protests garnered broad support from outside of the indigenous community, too.²⁵ In response to the protests, Ecuador’s government did concede to negotiations, which brought about small-scale victories for the organizers, including formal representation on select commissions. More importantly, however, it sent a clear message to organizers that the government was responsive to such social movements. Unsurprisingly, then, there have been a number of small-scale movements (e.g. 1992 and 1994) and additional large-scale events like those that ousted two presidents from office (in 1997 and 2000) since the initial

²³ Deborah Yashar, "Democracy, Indigenous Movements, and Postliberal Challenge in Latin America," *World Politics* 52, no. 1 (October 1999): 85

²⁴ Amalia Pallares, *From Peasant Struggles to Indian Resistance: The Ecuadorian Andes in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002): 17-20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

uprising.²⁶ The importance of these events is twofold. First, they demonstrated the effectiveness of mass mobilization to indigenous people around the continent, and second, they eventually led to the formation of a new, indigenous political party – Pachakutik-Nuevo País – in 1996.

Following the uprisings in Ecuador, additional social movements by, or inclusive of, indigenous populations occurred elsewhere in Latin America. One example is the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico in response to NAFTA negotiations. According to Ceceña and Barreda, this uprising, which is often framed simply as resistance movement by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) to loss of land due to the free trade agreement, was far more than that for its indigenous members. To them, it represented an opportunity to defend “territoriality and sovereignty” from the capitalist world order.²⁷ Unlike those that condemned NAFTA on economic expectations alone, Mexico’s indigenous people worried about the encroachment of private firms on both their land and their culture.

Protests in Bolivia provide a second example. Indigenous mobilization occurred a bit later than in Ecuador, but large-scale movements against water privatization in 2001 and gas privatization in 2003 undoubtedly led to improved political outcomes. In particular, they provided organizational space for Bolivia’s new indigenous party – *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) – to organize members, strengthen its networks, and broadly publicize its policy positions. The resulting success of this elevated platform is evident by the fact that the party, which was founded in 1998, elected its first members to parliament in 2002, and subsequently, won the presidency with Evo Morales’ successful campaign in 2006.²⁸

Notably, large-scale indigenous movements have not occurred in Guatemala or Peru. In Guatemala, this may be attributed to the fact that the country’s civil war did not conclude until 1996, during which indigenous people were disproportionately brutalized, as “83 percent of the people killed in the internal armed conflict were indigenous.”²⁹ Understandably, this has likely resulted in hesitation by Guatemala’s indigenous peoples’ willingness to embrace an indigenous identity.³⁰ Such hesitation, of course, means that it is extremely unlikely than any large-scale, collective organization could coalesce or organize a substantial political movement. The country does have several independent groups that separately represent various indigenous interests,³¹ but their electoral success and mobilization has inarguably been on a smaller scale than that observed in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Mexico.

²⁶ Kenneth Jameson, “The Indigenous Movement in Ecuador: The Struggle for a Plurinational State,” *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no.1 (January 2011): 63.

²⁷ Ana Ceceña and Andrés Barreda, “Chiapas and the Global Restructuring of Capitalism,” in *¡Zapatista!* ed. John Holloway and Eloína Peláez (London: Pluto Press, 1998): 58-59.

²⁸ Isabella Radhuber, “Indigenous Struggles for a Plurinational State: An Analysis of Indigenous Rights and Competences in Bolivia.” *Journal of Latin American Geography* 11, no. 2 (2012): 170-171.

²⁹ Karine Vanthuyne, “Becoming Maya? The Politics and Pragmatics of “Being Indigenous” in Postgenocide Guatemala,” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 32, no. 2 (November 2009): 195.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Deborah Yashar, “Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 1 (October 1998): 26.

Of the five nations, Peru is most seriously lacking any indigenous mobilization. Mayer writes, “In Peru, there is no Indian movement. The political proposal to organize specifically around indigenous identity is a profound failure in the country.”³² Yashar attributes this failure to a lack of “networks [organized by the state, unions, the Church, etc.] that enabled indigenous communities to transcend localized identities and to identify commonly trusted leaders” that could lead mobilizations in an era of political liberalization during the late twentieth century.³³ Others argue that the Peruvian government was stricter in its repression of Indian identity than other nations citing examples like its ban on the use of the term “Indian” that resulted in legitimate fears of death and violence in response to mobilization. This essay leaves the exact reason for stalled mobilization in Peru to other scholars, but the importance of this discussion is that it clearly demonstrates that the degree of indigenous politicization has varied throughout Latin America. Accordingly, the political power of indigenous groups also varies by location.

Indigenous Political Power

In Ecuador and Bolivia, indigenous mobilization resulted in the formation of national political parties organized specifically around indigenous issues and that run indigenous candidates. Unsurprisingly, indigenous people have also experienced the largest gains in these two countries. In Ecuador, convocation of a constituent assembly in 2007 to form a new constitution was largely viewed as a “victory for the indigenous movement.”³⁴ Driven by persistent social movements and a popular rejection of the neoliberal order of the preceding years, the legislature, under the leadership of leftist president Rafael Correa, passed a markedly new constitution in 2008. It certainly did not meet all the desires of organized indigenous interests, but it did include some major victories. Principally, it recognized Ecuador as a *plurinational* state for the first time and provided substantial collective rights to indigenous communities. This had been the central demand of CONAIE since the *levantamientos* of the early 1990s, and the organization has since used this victory to “declare itself the government of the nationalities of the indigenous peoples of Ecuador and develop positions and programs consistent with the view of its sovereignty that has found a place in the new constitution.”³⁵ A full discussion of the fine distinction between plurinationalism and other systems like pluriculturalism or multiculturalism is beyond the focus of this essay,³⁶ but what is most

³² Enrique Mayer, “Reflexiones Sobre los Derechos Individuales y Colectivos: Los Derechos Étnicos,” in *Construir la Democracia: Derechos Humanos, Ciudadanía y Sociedad en América Latina* ed. Eric Hershberg and Elizabeth Jelin (Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 1996): 175.

³³ Deborah Yashar, “Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 1 (October 1998): 37-38.

³⁴ Marc Becker, “Correa, Indigenous Movements, and the Writing of a New Constitution in Ecuador,” *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no. 1 (January 2011): 49.

³⁵ Kenneth Jameson, “The Indigenous Movement in Ecuador: The Struggle for a Plurinational State,” *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no.1 (January 2011): 71.

³⁶ For a deeper discussion see Mark Tushnet, “The new ‘Bolivarian’ Constitutions: a textual analysis” in *Comparative Constitutional Law in Latin America* ed. Rosalind Dixon and Tom Ginsburg (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017): 126-152.

important from a comparative stance is that this major victory by indigenous people in Ecuador took less than 20 years from their initial mobilization in the 1990s.

Despite success on plurinationalism, other demands of Ecuador's indigenous populations were not met as fully. The 2008 constitution did not recognize Kichwa (Quechua) – the most widely spoken indigenous language in Ecuador – as an official language, and more importantly, it did not provide indigenous communities the right to veto national authorization for industrial resource extraction activities on their lands.³⁷ While it does assure that local indigenous organizations will be consulted in the review of these requests, consent by the residing communities is not constitutionally required for federally approved mining and gas companies to occupy their lands. This decision was widely disparaged by indigenous leaders. Accordingly, Becker concludes that, “many on the indigenous left viewed the new constitution as a mixed bag.”³⁸ While they achieved a substantial victory in lobbying for Latin America's first constitution to recognize a plurinational state, there remains uncertainty as to just how far their individual sovereignty extends. Nonetheless, however, the fact that a new constitution was passed demonstrates that the indigenous people of Ecuador – primarily through CONAIE – have formidable political power. They did not get all they wanted, but getting something at all is a comparative victory.

The current landscape of Bolivia is very similar to that of Ecuador. Following a constituent assembly from 2006-2007, the country approved a new constitution in January 2009 that contained substantial improvements for the nation's indigenous population.³⁹ Primary among these improvements, the new constitution recognized Bolivia as a “unitary, social, plurinational, communitarian state governed by the rule of law.”⁴⁰ Additionally, it recognized 36 indigenous languages as official languages, “allows for autonomy for regions predominantly populated by indigenous ‘nations and peoples,’” permits community justice, guarantees collective rights,⁴¹ and ensures “proportional representation of Indigenous peoples in the national legislature.”⁴² By comparison, these gains go even further than those provided by Ecuador's constitution. Surprisingly, there is little existing literature as to why this might be. Some likely reasons, however, include the fact that Bolivia's president during constitutional reform, Morales, is indigenous and was elected from the country's indigenous party, MAS. Ecuador's Correa, on the other hand, is a mestizo and was elected from a political party he helped form (*Allianza PAIS*), which is distinct from his country's indigenous party, Pachakutik-Nuevo País. Additionally, Bolivia's indigenous population is a majority of the country whereas Ecuador's accounts for a smaller percentage. This disparity is also reflected in the representation of indigenous parties in each country's legislature as Bolivia's MAS consistently wins a greater

³⁷ Marc Becker, “Correa, Indigenous Movements, and the Writing of a New Constitution in Ecuador,” *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no. 1 (January 2011): 58.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ John Hammond, “Indigenous Community Justice in the Bolivian Constitution of 2009,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 33 (2011): 649.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 654.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Roberta Rice, “How to Decolonize Democracy: Indigenous Governance Innovation in Bolivia and Nunavut, Canada,” *Bolivian Studies Journal* 22 (2016): 226.

percentage of seats than Pachakutik-Nuevo País.⁴³ Thus, while the indigenous people of Ecuador still largely exercise their political power through social movements organized and coordinated by CONAIE, Bolivia's indigenous population has seemingly greater formal political power given the much greater legislative presence of MAS.

Importantly, the power of indigenous people in Ecuador and Bolivia should not be understood to represent that of indigenous people throughout Latin America. Instead, the cases of Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru demonstrate how weak organized indigenous interests remain in many Latin American countries. Indigenous people in Mexico, despite the small degree of politicization detailed previously, have not seen any enduring organization that represents indigenous interests in the political arena. The EZLN, which led the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, was perhaps the closest to becoming such an organization, but it "distanced itself from the state and political parties when talks broke down... over issues of autonomy and self-government within indigenous communities. The Zapatistas have since turned inward in an attempt to build de facto self-governing communities" externally from the state.⁴⁴ Thus, these activists seemingly view their best avenue for success to be outside of the formal political sphere. While the EZLN cannot be indicative of all indigenous groups in Mexico, what is important about indigenous political power in Mexico at large is that there is seemingly no unified movement that expresses the demands of all indigenous people collectively and negotiates or lobbies on their behalf.

In Guatemala and Peru, the political power of indigenous interests is seemingly even weaker. According to Van Cott, despite the large populations of indigenous people in both countries, "no viable ethnic party emerged in Peru to represent the politically excluded indigenous population,"⁴⁵ and in Guatemala, the political power of indigenous peoples remains quite limited to local governance in municipalities with large numbers of indigenous people.⁴⁶ In both nations, there have been no prominent gains for indigenous people in the last several decades, and there is little indication that there will be any in the near future. Thus, these five cases show extraordinary differentiation in terms of the political power of indigenous groups in Latin America. The indigenous people of Bolivia have the strongest, formalized political power through representation in an electorally successful political party. The indigenous people of Ecuador also have significant political power, but their access to politics comes more from an external association with CONAIE than through an institutionalized political party. The indigenous people of Mexico, likely due to their sheer number, have shown signs of political engagement, but they have yet to effectively coalesce into any kind of collective organization that broadly represents their political interests in any meaningful way. Finally, the indigenous people of Guatemala and Peru have the least political power, as there has

⁴³ Raúl Madrid, "Indigenous Parties and Democracy in Latin America," *Latin American Politics & Society* 47, no. 4 (2005): 164.

⁴⁴ Roberta Rice, "Indigenous Political Representation in Latin America," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2017): 5.

⁴⁵ Donna Van Cott, *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2005): 140.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 232.

seemingly been no large-scale national action taken in either country to lodge the demands of indigenous people on recent governments.

Contemporary Demands

While the previous section identified demands initially driving indigenous movements in Ecuador and Bolivia, their new constitutions have largely addressed these. Of course, each nation's indigenous population is still navigating what it means to be plurinational and likely has a long list of additional political changes they favor, but most of the recent literature on indigenous political engagement is highly concentrated on a single topic: land sovereignty. While this concern is not new, it has seemingly replaced plurinationalism as the key agenda item within contemporary indigenous political discourse.

Although Ecuador and Bolivia's new constitutions brought about many favorable changes for indigenous people, they also emphasized "the industrialization and commercialization of natural resources to be a key priority of the State."⁴⁷ The rationale for this being that revenues from taxation on industries like mining and hydrocarbons could generate the funding necessary to continue expansion of social programs. Scholars warn, though, "much depends on how well [the administration] is able to manage the strategy of linking export taxes to welfare expansion and the management of natural resources," as "indigenous communities resist further commodification and foreign ownership or exploitation of land they hold sacred."⁴⁸ According to a constitutional comparison made by Lalander, Ecuador's new constitution has more land protections for indigenous people than Bolivia's does, but the language in neither provides any real power to indigenous people to supersede government plans for their land.⁴⁹ It should be unsurprising, then, that more recent mobilization in both countries has principally called for increased political power to protect "sovereign" lands.

For example, in 2011 Bolivians gathered for a 600 kilometer march from the regional capital of Trinidad to the national capital, La Paz, to protest the construction of a road through Isobore Sécure National park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS). Not only did they view the road itself as problematic, but they also anticipated it would be used in the future to connect private industry with areas previously too remote for them to access.⁵⁰ What was different about this protest from previous ones, however, was the staunch resistance protestors met from the national government. After 40 days of the march, Morales' administration deployed a police force on a peacekeeping mission to the site of the march. Instead of keeping the peace, though, there was a raid on the protestors' camp in which police violently arrested a number of the indigenous participants. The exact rationale for

⁴⁷ Rickard Lalander, "Rights of Nature and the Indigenous Peoples in Bolivia and Ecuador: A Straightjacket for Progressive Development Politics?" *Iberoamerican Journal of Development Studies* 3, no. 2 (2014): 150.

⁴⁸ Jean Grugel and Pía Riggirozzi, "Post-neoliberalism in Latin America: Rebuilding and Reclaiming the State after Crisis," *Development and Change* 43 (January 2012): 8.

⁴⁹ Rickard Lalander, "Rights of Nature and the Indigenous Peoples in Bolivia and Ecuador: A Straightjacket for Progressive Development Politics?" *Iberoamerican Journal of Development Studies* 3, no. 2 (2014): 159.

⁵⁰ John-Andrew McNeish, "Extraction, Protest and Indigeneity in Bolivia: The TIPNIS Effect," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 8, no. 2 (July 2013): 224-226.

arrests remains opaque today, but the important thing is that this raid would be seen as a “complete contradiction with the outward image of the Morales government,” and is credited with “sparking the most significant crisis of public confidence in the Bolivian government since its arrival to power in 2006.”⁵¹ Despite having political representation at the highest levels, indigenous people found themselves in a situation where “their” political party was permitting policy they admonished and repressing the channels available to express their discontent. Should this approach continue, the indigenous people of Bolivia might have to explore new avenues for their political participation outside of those to which they have grown accustomed.

The situation in Ecuador is quite similar. Through a comprehensive quantitative analysis, Latorre et al. come to the arguably sad conclusion that “between 1980 and 2013 Ecuador’s role as an exporter of primary goods and host to externalized environment damage has remained largely unchanged. On the contrary, Ecuador has begun to establish itself as an outsourcer of the increasingly scarce resource ‘pristine environmental quality.’”⁵² Of course, indigenous people have protested the growing number of extractive industries allowed to operate in what they assert are their sovereign lands, but their resistance has largely been unsuccessful. One possible explanation for this is that indigenous people in Ecuador, since their politicization in the 1990s, have relied on joint support from poor communities around Ecuador. Many non-indigenous pockets of the country’s population backed their calls for improved living conditions in the neoliberal era, but concerning environmental protections, they have not been able to amass such broad support. Principally, this is because Ecuador’s non-indigenous poor have become comfortable with the tradeoff of natural resources for improved welfare programs, as they do not have the same connection to the land as the indigenous people.⁵³ Thus, an important caveat is needed in the assessment of political power advanced above. In Ecuador, the indigenous people do have political power, but it is moderated by their ability to coopt support from non-indigenous groups.

This essay does not provide a contemporary analysis of indigenous political demands in Mexico, Guatemala, or Peru. Without formal organization, it would be impossible to conclude what the indigenous people want. Due to the parallels between the demands of indigenous people in Ecuador and Bolivia, it seems likely that they would share similar goals to those espoused in the initial phases of social mobilization in these countries, but until this is formally articulated, it ought not be assumed. Accordingly, in addition to very weak political power, it is also fair to characterize the political demands of indigenous people in Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru as ambiguous, at best.

Looking Ahead

Projecting the future political success of indigenous people in Latin America is not straightforward. Given their degrees of political power, it is reasonable to predict that the indigenous populations of Ecuador and Bolivia,

⁵¹ Ibid, 222.

⁵² Sara Latorre, Katharine Farrell, and Joan Martínez-Alier, “The Commodification of Nature and Socio-environmental Resistance in Ecuador: An Inventory of Accumulation by Dispossession Cases, 1980-2013” *Ecological Economics* 116, (2015): 66.

⁵³ Ibid, 67.

so long as national leaders depend on their support, will continue to make improvements to their quality of life. Undoubtedly, increasing national respect for their culture and traditions can go a long way in allowing them to live life according to their own principles, but it is unlikely that they will ever fully govern themselves in complete independence of the state. Additionally, it is unlikely that there will be any immediate changes in their economic status as better paying jobs, access to better education, and similar economic demands have never, in large part, been a part of their political platform. Perhaps these will come up in future demands, but at least initially, autonomy has been the goal. Despite these limitations, though, the outlook for their future is the best among the cases studied.

For the populations that have not yet developed any form of centralized political organization, perhaps the best predictions for their future can be surmised from studying the Ecuadorian and Bolivian cases. Problematically, however, the social forces credited with spurring indigenous politicization in the success cases were also present in Mexico and Peru, at least. For Guatemala and Peru, it is possible that the process simply needs more time. In Guatemala, the recent end to civil war means that if political change for the indigenous people, if it comes at all, is a long time coming. In Peru, however, change could come quicker. As the 2009 protests against highway construction and expanding oil extraction in the northern Peruvian Amazon suggest, politicized social movements led by indigenous people are possible,⁵⁴ but without any large-scale ability to organize, the future viability of enacting real change is uncertain. To give political change a chance, the indigenous populations of Peru and Guatemala will both likely need to follow the path of those in Ecuador, given the fact that the indigenous population is not a majority in either country. This means indigenous activists will first need to create some semblance of an organization that can respectfully represent all, or at least a critical mass, of their nation's unique indigenous people collectively. Provided they are able to do so, they could then use this organization to join their political demands with those of other groups on the nation's political left to try installing political elites that are sympathetic to their cause. It will only be when they win such political representation at the national level that any systematic changes can be made to improve their livelihood.

The future for the indigenous people of Mexico is perhaps the most pessimistic of all. First, despite their number being the largest in any Latin American country, they make up a relatively small percentage of Mexico's total population (~15%).⁵⁵ While this is not on its own preventative, the smaller concentration of indigenous people than in the other cases means that activists will have substantial work to do in creating alliances with other political groups while still attempting to maintain the autonomy of their interests as indigenous people. This is a difficult balancing act to maintain. Georgina Waylen writes about the struggle women's groups have encountered

⁵⁴ Neil Huges, "Indigenous Protest in Peru: The 'Orchard Dog' Bites Back," *Social Movement Studies* 9, no. 1 (2010): 86.

⁵⁵ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Indigenous Peoples in Latin America," September 2014.

in Latin America as broad-interest political parties attempt to, at times, co-opt their issues,⁵⁶ and there is no reason to believe that indigenous political leaders would not face similar challenges in aligning themselves with existing loci of political power. A second reason for pessimism is the fact that the indigenous population showed signs of being able to launch social movements like those observed in Ecuador and Bolivia, but when they got to the negotiating table, they found negotiators too far apart from them.⁵⁷ This seemingly soured their position on advocating for formal political change, which has stymied any future progress. To rule progress out completely would be wrong, but little about the Mexican case provides reasonable optimism for the future.

Conclusion

In summary, there is no single way to characterize what democratization has meant for the indigenous people of Latin America. The five countries with the most significant populations of indigenous people demonstrate great variety in how democracy has affected these communities. In Guatemala, it is probably too soon to draw any conclusions, but the other countries studied throughout this essay have demonstrated that simply being a democracy does not mean that indigenous interests will receive representation or participate in politics in any meaningful way. For example, in Peru, where nearly one in four people identify as indigenous, there is no formal representation of their interests as indigenous people. They have no political party, no notable associational group, and have seemingly made negligible progress in improving their lives through political channels. Perhaps some would argue that this simply means they are content with their current standard of life. While possible, this is implausible. As mentioned early on, indigenous people, regardless of country, represent some of the poorest and most vulnerable people on the continent. In Peru alone, indigenous students on average attend 2.3 fewer years of school than their non-indigenous classmates. In Guatemala and Mexico, their situation is arguably worse. The indigenous poverty rate is approximately three times higher than that of non-indigenous people in both countries, and Guatemala has a 13-year difference in the life expectancy of indigenous people compared to their non-indigenous counterparts.⁵⁸ Thus, to suggest that they are content would be misguided.

What this analysis has shown, instead, is that democracy's relationship with the incorporation of indigenous people into politics is, at best, indirect. More specifically, democratization may support the type of civil society and degree of liberalism necessary for indigenous people to build sufficient networks to organize at a national level and conduct social movements, but it does not, alone, cause better outcomes for indigenous people. While this is not necessarily a surprising conclusion, it is an important one to understand as scholars frequently

⁵⁶ Georgina Waylen, "Women and Democratization: Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics," *World Politics* 46, no. 3 (1994): 340-342.

⁵⁷ Roberta Rice, "Indigenous Political Representation in Latin America," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2017): 5.

⁵⁸ United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Social Policy and Development, "State of the World's Indigenous People," UN.org (2010).

frame democracy as the best political regime type among alternative options.⁵⁹ This is certainly true along a broad range of evaluative criteria, but it is, at a minimum, necessary to also recognize the limitations democracy has for incorporating marginalized groups – particularly ones that believe in their right to govern themselves autonomously. This essay demonstrates some ways in which polities can address this challenge of incorporation, but it also suggests that they will not pursue them proactively. Instead, it first takes indigenous people specifically organizing around this identity and subsequent mobilization on a large-scale to provide them any platform to demand change.

The demands made by indigenous communities that are able to do this range from standard socioeconomic desires like better access to healthcare and an improved standard of living, to more ethnically specific requests for self-governance, bilingual education, land sovereignty and more. The degree to which they have received these outcomes varies, but there is clearly no case in which organized indigenous interests have received everything they want. Of course, getting everything one wants should not be a measure of democracy's success as a political system, but hopefully this essay has provided insight into the limitations of a country's installation of free and fair elections. Without a complementary civil society that is strong and both respects and protects rights to freedom of speech, assembly, and to petition the government, it seems none of the gains in Ecuador or Bolivia could have been possible. Thus, while this essay largely served to contextualize the current situation of indigenous people in a select subset of nations, it can also contribute to broader discourses about the state of democratic consolidation in these countries and the inherent inclusiveness of democracy as a political system.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Juan Linz and Al Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 39-54.

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