

**Indigenous populations and electoral politics in Bolivia, Guatemala, and Chiapas,
Mexico.**

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January 20, 2005

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Part I Introduction

This study is an historical comparison of the electoral participation of Indigenous populations in three significant regions of Latin America: Bolivia, Guatemala, and Chiapas (Mexico).¹ All three regions are significant because they enclose the highest concentration of Indigenous peoples in South, Central and North America. Approximately 90% of the Indigenous peoples of this hemisphere are either Andean (residing in Bolivia; Peru; Ecuador; Colombia and Chile) or Mesoamerican (residing in Guatemala; Honduras; El Salvador; Belize or Mexico).² As a result, these region's Indigenous populations represent majorities or near-majorities yet, in each case, they have failed to consistently wield corresponding electoral clout. Even when Indigenous peoples constitute a clear majority of the total population, as in the cases of Bolivia and Guatemala, they have been generally unsuccessful in shaping public policy to secure their three crucial demands: "self-determination, land rights, and cultural survival."³

This paper has been organized in four parts. Part I introduces the research questions and provides a rationale for and description of the analysis to follow. Part II chronicles how Indigenous peoples have participated in electoral politics within the colonizing states in which they now live. Part III identifies some of the major obstacles that have prevented Indigenous participation in elections for the three regions of Bolivia, Chiapas, and Guatemala. Part IV concludes with a theoretical discussion of the implications of increased Indigenous involvement for Latin American elections as well as some questions regarding electoral involvement by Indigenous peoples that require further exploration.

¹ Although Chiapas is not currently an independent nation-state, it did briefly hold state status in the 19th century before it was voluntarily annexed by Mexico.

² Kay Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan-Mayan Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 8-9.

³ Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village – Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 59.

Research Questions, Research Rationale, and Literature Review

With the highest Indigenous population in the Americas, why are Indigenous *Bolivianos*, *Chiapanecos*, and *Guatemaltecos* not succeeding in electoral politics even when they have an enormous stake in the outcome? What obstacles are preventing Indigenous self-determination even when they make up a majority or plurality of the total population?

These two questions deserve academic analysis due to Western scholars' general neglect of Latin American Indigenous issues as well as an acute lack of scholarship on the subject of Indigenous electoral participation. Even a preliminary literature review reveals large gaps in the English historiography of Latin American indigenous issues. Indeed, the vast majority of the English-language literature focuses upon the Indigenous populations in the former British colonies: Australia; Canada; New Zealand and the United States of America. As a result, most of the scholarship on Indigenous self-determination is premised on their assumed minority status where Indigenous peoples make up between 1% (Australia) and 10% (New Zealand) of the total population.⁴

One Latin Americanist recently noted that this tendency is also prevalent in the literature on Latin America where “much discussion of the recent success of indigenous organization has focused on the numerically minority indigenous populations, such as those in Nicaragua and Colombia.”⁵ Therefore, Indigenous marginalization by nation-states is often attributed to their minority status despite the evident exceptions of Bolivia,

⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook*: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html> Accessed Nov. 20, 2004.

⁵ Rachel Sieder, “Introduction” in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor). (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 5.

Guatemala and Chiapas, which defy such a simple explanation for their political weakness. Both Bolivia and Guatemala contain a subjugated Indigenous majority, or in the case of Chiapas a large minority, confronting a non-Indigenous ruling elite.⁶ Therefore, minority status cannot explain why Indigenous peoples have failed to significantly influence the political institutions and policies of these three regions despite their demographic advantage and increasing national prominence.

Perhaps an even more compelling reason for this research can be found in the requests by Indigenous organizations themselves for such assistance. A South American Indigenous organization was the catalyst for the most comprehensive study to date of Indigenous peoples and elections, *Challenging Politics: Indigenous Peoples' Experiences With Political Parties and Elections*.⁷ In this volume, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) has compiled one of the most comprehensive assessments of Indigenous participation in state elections. However, *Challenging Politics* provides only one chapter for all of the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, and South America. Therefore, the paucity of secondary sources further demonstrates the need for further exploration of this topic. Another recent book edited by Rachel Sieder, *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, proclaims a similar interest in initiating a new scholarly focus on the alliances between Indigenous movements and political parties.⁸

⁶ Although the majority of Mexicans consider themselves to be Mestizos or “mixed bloods”, their country is to be included in this study because its Indigenous population is the largest of any American nation-state.

⁷ Editor Kathrin Wessendorf, IWGIA Document No. 104 (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2001), p. 10.

⁸ Rachel Sieder, “Introduction” in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 9.

Normative commitment to Indigenous Self-Determination

This paper is intended to be the first step in a critical social scientific project that seeks to better understand if and how Indigenous communities can transcend their political subjugation through participation in their respective states' national elections. If electoral participation is determined to be successful insofar as achieving concrete autonomous measures, it may then be useful to explore electoral strategies for Indigenous peoples in Latin America as a means to rebalance the power relationship between them and the non-Indigenous populations in their respective regions. Critical Social Science (CSS) is a label borrowed from W. Laurence Neuman's *Social Research Methods – Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Its basic tenets are an activist approach to bring about profound structural change that favours “an historical –comparative method because of its emphasis on change and because it helps a researcher uncover underlying structures.”⁹ The preliminary results of this paper will help determine how a critical social scientific approach may be applied to the larger projects of decolonizing by facilitating Indigenous self-determination in Latin America.

Indigenous Identity

Determining which individuals, communities, or movements are Indigenous is exceedingly complex. Sociologist Manuel Castells and political scientist Alison Brysk are the two theorists who are relied upon for a working definition of “Indigenous”. Castells defines identity as the prioritization of certain cultural attributes that symbolically identify a “social actor” and serve to influence his or her actions, which provides a useful definition

⁹ (Toronto: Allyn & Bacon, 1994), 66-72.

of identity. Internalization of those attributes must occur for this prioritization of attributes, and for identities and their attendant meanings to be instilled in individuals. He argues that identities and their attendant meanings only exist if they have been internalized by the individual. Brysk has analyzed the international Indigenous rights movement in the Americas and describes its use of cultural attributes as symbols:

Identity Politics should involve an explicit appeal to identity for movement mobilization and external campaigns, the use of identity markers as symbols, and the politicization of cultural practices. Identity politics often cuts across other axes of political affiliation such as class and political party. Characteristic (but not exclusive) mechanisms of identity politics include symbolic appeals, information campaigns, and legitimacy challenges to dominant institutions and regimes.¹⁰

Defining who is Indigenous is increasingly complex and contested. For example, it is virtually impossible to demarcate where one's identity as a Mayan, Aymara, or Quechua can be separated from his or her economic role as a peasant farmer or *campesino*. A useful but incomplete definition is provided by Carlos Montemayor, "To be an Indian in Mexico is not just to have a particular physical appearance...[i]t is also to speak an Indian language, to live on ancestral land, to practice traditional customs, and to hold the age-old values of the community within which you live."¹¹ This definition is no longer sufficient as it reifies Indigenous peoples in a manner that often leads to their categorical disqualification as they modernize, urbanize, and rely increasingly on new languages and customs. The United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities provides another useful definition:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their

¹⁰ Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village – Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 23.

¹¹ As quoted in Ignacio Ramonet, "Marcos Marches on Mexico City," in *The Zapatista Reader*, Editor Tom Hayden (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002), p. 137.

territories, considered themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity as the basis of their continued existence as people, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.”¹²

The above definition is useful because it emphasizes its use of the phrase “non-dominant sectors of society” is central to this paper. Following its logic, this definition presents the curious possibility of semantic exclusion from Indigenous for the Indigenous peoples of Bolivia, Guatemala, and Chiapas should they cease to be “non-dominant sectors.” The essential point is that the term Indigenous refers to culturally distinct and historically marginalized groups whose ancestral territories are now dominated by new waves of migrants.

Assimilation Policy in Latin America: *Indigenismo*

Defining who is Indigenous becomes especially difficult in light of the political fusion of race and class that was promoted in the colonial era. As early as the 19th century, there were determined efforts to establish legitimizing identities whereby Indigenous peoples in these three areas would shed their “indigenous national identity” in exchange for the neo-European states that were being carved out of the New World.¹³ This assimilative

¹² As quoted in Donna Lee Van Cott, “A Political Analysis of Legal Pluralism in Bolivia and Colombia.” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 32 (1), p. 208.

¹³ Three types or forms of identity are identified by renowned sociologist Manuel Castells in *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture – Volume II – The Power of Identity* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997): legitimizing, resistance, and project. *Legitimizing identity* is the identity that is promoted by the state to legitimize its power and authority. In Chiapas, all citizens were expected to identify as Mexican and/or *Chiapaneco* until the EZLN rebellion swept away the hegemonic myth of a single state-constructed identity with the arrival of an opposing Zapatista identity (282). Castells’ second and third forms of identity enlighten an understanding of this new identity as well as the political transformation of indigenous peoples in Chiapas. *Resistance identity* is generated by marginalized groups who build “trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of

policy accelerated during the 20th century when virtually all Latin American states endorsed the assimilative policy of “Indigenismo” which sought to transform Mayans into Mexicans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, or Salvadoreans and Quechua and Aymaras into Bolivians, Ecuadorians, or Peruvians. The erasure of Indigenous identities and their replacement with a new legitimizing identity has remained national policy in much of the Americas. Decades of channelling indigenous grievances into non-indigenous political processes combined with Indigenismo have deliberately undermined and weakened autonomous indigenous political institutions and blurred ethnic and Indigenous identities.¹⁴ Therefore, *Indigenismo* refers to the policy initiatives that sought to assimilate Indigenous populations to create a new homogenous *mestizo* or mixed-blood society.

The toxic environment created by the continued denigration of Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas and the assimilative policies of *Indigenismo* have placed enormous pressure on Indigenous identities. The result has been a deliberate fracturing of many of the Indigenous political alliances. A Maori scholar writes that “fragmentation has been the consequence of Imperialism” for Indigenous peoples.¹⁵ Her observation holds true in the Americas where the “atomization” of Indigenous polities has been a conscious component of colonization with countless examples of Spanish manipulation of Indigenous ethnic divisions during the Conquest.¹⁶

society” (8). The *Project identity* is constructed from available cultural materials to redefine one’s “position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure” (Ibid.)

¹⁴ Until recently, Indigenous peoples have had their politics channelled into non-indigenous political institutions such as peasant, student, and union organizations by nation-states, which sought to assimilate them. Julio C. Tresierra, “Mexico: Indigenous Peoples and the Nation-State,” in *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America*, Donna Lee Van Cott (Editor), (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), p. 190.

¹⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), p. 28.

¹⁶ See Hector Diaz-Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p. 53-4. There are hundreds of examples to choose from. A topical one in the case of Guatemala was the Spanish army led by Pedro de Alvarado which subdued the Quiché Mayans with the assistance of Cakchiquel Maya. Once the Quiché subjugation was complete, Alvarado’s army turned on their former Cakchiquel allies.

Indigenous Organizing

Reversing this atomization and fragmentation, as well as colonization itself, may depend on how successfully distinct Indigenous communities can once again coalesce to re-establish old alliances as well as create new ones. Indigenous organizing at the national and international levels has been relatively recent.¹⁷ Independent Indigenous organizations, beginning with the Shuar of Ecuador, have steadily expanded since their formation in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁸ Pan-Mayan movements are already prominent in Guatemala and Chiapas. Andean nations such as the Aymara and Quechua have also been organizing *Katarista* political organizations and returning to ancient symbols such as the Tahuantinsuyu flag of Wiphala.¹⁹ Early successes have also led to opposition from those who have benefited from divisions that have historically hindered Indigenous organizing. The growing backlash already underway against pan-Indigenous organizations is a clear indication that Indigenous unity is perceived as a threat throughout Latin America.²⁰

Caveat on Comparative Analysis

There are several variables that should be included in an analysis of each region's potential for Indigenous self-determination by electoral means. These include: political

¹⁷ For analyses of the international and transnational Indigenous rights movements, see Alison Brysk *From Tribal Village to Global Village – Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); and Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California, 2003).

¹⁸ Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Indigenous Movements and Politics in Mexico and Latin America" in *Aboriginal Rights and Self-Government: The Canadian and Mexican Experience in North American Perspective*, (Curtis Cook and Juan D. Lindau Editors), (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), p. 76.

¹⁹ The Wiphala flag is derived from the rainbow, an important symbol for Indigenous Andeans, that illustrates "unity in diversity." Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village – Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 72-73.

²⁰ Kay Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan-Mayan Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 10, 66.

institutions; ideology; cooptation and/or persecution of Indigenous movements; and traditional political customs. Furthermore, there are many other factors that contribute to Indigenous political marginalization: poverty; language barriers; and traditional ethnic divisions. Discussing the particularities of each region is beyond the scope of this paper but each of these factors will be considered and examined for the dissertation. We will now proceed with an overview of Indigenous peoples and elections in Latin America.

Part II Indigenous Participation in Nation-State Elections

Bolivia, Guatemala, and Chiapas have governments that have generally proven unsympathetic and even hostile to their respective Indigenous populations.²¹ This lack of support for Indigenous interests by Latin American nation-states is reflected in the lack of “horizontal citizenship”; a concept that refers to the sense of shared destiny between residents of a given polity.²² Mutual fear and suspicion has long tarnished Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations and overcoming this legacy of mistrust represents one of the major challenges for democratization throughout Latin America.

Autonomy and Democratization in Latin America

Decolonization will require a shift in the power relationship between Indigenous populations and the neo-European colonizing states. Indigenous movements are now

²¹ Political scientist Donna Lee Van Cott has studied this phenomenon and noted that out of the five Latin American countries with the largest concentrations of Indigenous peoples, only Ecuador has granted formal recognition. The remaining four countries in Van Cott’s study, Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, have all resisted the granting of ethnic autonomy to their Indigenous populations. Unfortunately for our purposes, Van Cott limits her analysis of Indigenous participation in the existing political systems of these countries to their roles as pressure groups seeking self-government. “Explaining Ethnic Autonomy Regimes in Latin America,” *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Winter 2001, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 52.

²² Rachel Sieder, “Introduction” in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 6.

widespread throughout Latin America and some are no longer satisfied with inclusion of Indigenous people as mere citizens. Their ambitions now routinely include autonomous territories with distinct law-making powers. Internal self-determination, autonomous self-government regimes that are organized within established nation-states, has generally been the paramount Indigenous political demand. This is no longer the case. Although the vast majority of Indigenous movements are still searching for internal solutions to their conflicts with colonizing states, a clear secessionist or separatist strain is becoming increasingly visible. For example, these demands for external self-determination are now prominent in Bolivia where Felipe Quispe leads a movement that seeks to separate from that country to form a new independent Indigenous republic bearing the Incan name Kollasuyu with “our own army, flag, constitution, and education.”²³ Nonetheless, no political movement in Chiapas or Guatemala is currently championing external self-determination.

However, demands for internal rather than external self-determination remain the most common political demand by Indigenous peoples.²⁴ Autonomy demands are intertwined with calls for the democratization of a state in which Indigenous peoples seek greater representation and influence.²⁵

*National democracy and autonomy are intimately linked. Autonomy can create the particular conditions – especially for self-government – that make possible the exercise of ethnic groups’ rights (linguistic, economic, social, etc.), and it can annul oppressive relationships and resolve issues raised by sociocultural privilege. In brief, the imperatives of national democracy make autonomy unavoidable. Thus it is in a democratic project that ethnic groups find a formation for their demand for autonomy.*²⁶

²³ Editorial, “Indigenous People in South America – A Political Awakening” in *The Economist*, Feb. 21, 2004, p. 37.

²⁴ For a full discussion of the concept of self-determination as it pertains to Indigenous peoples, please see James Anaya, *Indigenous Peoples in International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Chapter 3.

²⁵ Rodolfo Stavenhagen, “Indigenous Movements and Politics in Mexico and Latin America” in *Aboriginal Rights and Self-Government: The Canadian and Mexican Experience in North American Perspective*, (Curtis Cook and Juan D. Lindau Editors), (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), p. 95.

²⁶ Hector Diaz-Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p. 90.

One of the main tasks of Indigenous and *campesino* organizations has been the democratization of their states. This point is essential because it has been in liberal democracies that Indigenous peoples have been able to best formulate and articulate their aspirations because democracies are the “most likely to permit or encourage the development of...organized criticism of governments that would bring indigenous delegates together without intimidation or interference.”²⁷ A transition towards democracy has grown steadily since the 1980s in much of Latin America, which has facilitated the impressive genesis and growth of its Indigenous organizations.²⁸ In Guatemala, the growing pan-Mayan movement has declared its support for a democratic project of “unity in diversity” that recognizes the pluralism inherent in a society with over 20 Mayan language groups.²⁹ However, this intellectual project of pan-Mayanism has yet to have a significant electoral impact.

Nonetheless, democratic reform will not be a panacea for Indigenous peoples unless there is a corresponding commitment to ensure viable economies. This is most apparent in Indigenous communities themselves.

*Removing a people’s control over the land, even while granting political freedoms, is a recipe for regional despotism. To give a people their own constitution, their own institutions, and their own forms of democracy, with no control over subsistence or local industry, creates conditions favourable to an insidious form of dependency, in which the only way for leaders to exercise power is to control and exploit the people themselves.*³⁰

²⁷ Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California, 2003), p. 56.

²⁸ The opinion that democratization is underway in Latin America is not universally held. For example, see Kay Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan-Mayan Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 24.

²⁹ Kay Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan-Mayan Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 13. For a detailed overview of critics’ views on pan-Mayanism, see p. 38-47.

³⁰ Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California, 2003), p. 90.

Extension of the franchise in Bolivia, Chiapas, & Guatemala

Historically disenfranchised, most Indigenous peoples in Latin America were not allowed to vote or they failed certain property or literacy requirements to do so.³¹ The integration of Indigenous peoples into Latin American electoral systems has been distinct in each of the three cases under discussion. Elections of the executive and legislative branches are the two political variables of most salience to this study. All three countries have been weak federations or completely centralized states. Until recently, Indigenous autonomy was a symptom of weak but highly centralized states that were unable to assert their authority in rural areas. Indigenous electoral participation was considered insignificant and political parties rarely mentioned Indigenous issues in their platforms. This longstanding neglect by mainstream political parties has begun to change with the advent of new, independent Indigenous parties that threaten their older Ladino (non-Indigenous) rivals. In order to better understand the historical integration of Indigenous peoples into Latin American elections, we will now chronicle the extension of the franchise to Indigenous peoples in Bolivia, Chiapas, and Guatemala.

Indigenous people in Bolivia were excluded from national politics during the colonial era up until the mid-twentieth century. In May, 1945, Indigenous Bolivians protested their exclusion from their country's political process by creating their own assembly.³² In 1952, a Bolivian revolution led to the ascension of the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) to power. The new president, Paz Estenssoro, extended the franchise to all Bolivians including the Indigenous for the first time in August of that

³¹ For example, the literacy requirement was only removed in Ecuador and Peru during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

³² J. McIver Weatherford, *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas transformed the world* (New York: Crown, 1988), p. 166.

year. However, a military coup in 1965 brought the MNR reign to an end. New electoral advances for Indigenous Bolivians would have to wait decades until the 1993 presidential election victory of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and his Aymara vice-president, Víctor Hugo Cardenas. Their term in office included several empowering reforms including the legalization of Indigenous political organizations and of traditional Indigenous medicine. Furthermore, bilingual education was introduced which allowed for Indigenous languages to be taught in Bolivian schools along with Spanish.³³

Chiapas was technically the first of our three regions that extended voting rights to its Indigenous residents. The Spanish administered Chiapas as part of the Captaincy of Guatemala from the conquest until the 19th century. After two years of independence from Guatemala, Chiapas joined Mexico in 1823 rather than the United Provinces of Central America. Universal male suffrage arrived in Mexico via the 1857 constitutional reforms but implementing and enforcing the right to vote have been inconsistent. By restricting access to voting, many in remote areas would never be given an opportunity to cast a ballot. Since the Mexican Revolution, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has dominated federal and state politics in Chiapas through “a combination of electoral fraud, targeted repression and controlled mobilisation of popular sectors...which were incorporated within the corporatist structures” of the governing party.³⁴ PRI hegemony was only broken with the 1994 Zapatista rebellion and the gubernatorial election of Alliance For Chiapas candidate Pablo Salazar in 2000.³⁵

³³ “Guatemala.” *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2001*. © 1993-2000 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

³⁴ Rachel Sieder, “Recognising Indigenous Law and the Politics of State Formation in Mesoamerica” in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 188.

³⁵ The enforcement of the Mexican law that required all citizens to vote was an ironic consequence of the 1988 scare when the PRI nearly lost the presidency to the PRD. As a result, many women began to vote for

Guatemala represents the most convoluted case due to a protracted period of civil conflict during the twentieth century. Although independent from Spanish rule since 1823, the vote was not granted to Indigenous men in Guatemala until the “Spring Revolution” of 1944-1954.³⁶ However, Guatemalan democracy and civil society are still recovering from the aftermath of the 1954 military coup that killed or displaced hundreds of thousands of primarily Indigenous Guatemalans. The genocide of that period has had lasting implications for Indigenous confidence in Guatemalan politics. A recent survey of urban Guatemalans indicated that Indigenous peoples express “sharply higher levels of fear” of political participation as compared to the Ladino or non-Indigenous population.³⁷ The consequences of this climate of fear can be described as follows:

Popular political organizations, disillusioned with the electoral process, discouraged their supporters from participating in elections. Voter abstention was high, and political choices limited. Practices such as vote buying, intimidation and ballot box stuffing further eroded the credibility of the electoral process...By the early 1980's, the restrictive elements of Guatemala's political process limited participation to parties with bases of support in the army, business, landowners or conservative religious groups. Politics and political parties were formed around individual personalities. Electoral law did little to encourage the formulation of political platforms.³⁸

The country's instability is evident when one considers that all political parties had been outlawed in 1982 by the military dictator Rios Montt. The periodic outlawing of political opposition has made it difficult and often impossible to organize against the state

the first time in 1994. June Nash, “The Reassertion of Indigenous Identity: Mayan Responses to State Intervention in Chiapas,” in *Latin American Research Review*, 2000, p. 16.

³⁶ Rachel Sieder, “Recognising Indigenous Law and the Politics of State Formation in Mesoamerica” in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 189.

³⁷ John A. Booth, “Global Forces and Regime Change: Guatemala in the Central American Context,” in *Journal of InterAmerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol 42, No. 4, 2001, p. 77.

³⁸ Common Borders – Elections in Latin America

http://www.commonborders.org/guatemala1999.htm#_Toc473088371

Date Accessed: Nov. 30, 2004

by peaceful means. As a result, civil conflict has been prevalent in Guatemala for almost 4 decades after the 1954 coup against President Arbenz. However, constitutional changes in the late 1980s have allowed new socialist and communist parties to be formed and military interference in civil affairs has steadily decreased over the past two decades. Nonetheless, Indigenous organizing has occurred mostly at the local level with national elections playing “no apparent significant role in Mayan strategy or influence.”³⁹

Class versus Ethnic-based Political Participation

Although it is relatively easy to pinpoint when suffrage became universal in Bolivia, Chiapas, and Guatemala, it has been more challenging to pinpoint exactly when Indigenous peoples became active in the electoral politics of their colonizing nation-states. Some individuals of Indigenous extraction participated even as early as the 19th century, including Mexican president Benito Juarez. Nonetheless, these are isolated cases where individuals participated as members of class-based rather than ethnic-based political parties.⁴⁰ As a result, the distinction between Indigenous peoples and *campesinos* has been relatively recent and remains difficult to delineate.

Distinguishing class from ethnicity creates some challenges for the purposes of this study. In Bolivia, Guatemala, and Mexico, Indigenous political participation in the 20th century has been understood to be overwhelmingly class-based. An individual’s ethnic identity was subsumed within their political status as a *campesino* or worker. The four

³⁹ Richard N. Adams, “A Report on the Political Status of the Guatemalan Maya,” in *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America*, Donna Lee Van Cott (Editor), (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), p. 169. Adams also notes that Mayan deputies were elected only 30 times to Congress in the four elections between 1974 and 1991 out of 464 opportunities. Therefore, Mayan legislative representation was approximately 7% despite being perhaps as much as 70% of the Guatemalan population (p. 172-173).

⁴⁰ Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village – Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 8.

major political upheavals of the last century involved substantial participation of Indigenous *campesinos* and workers: the Indigenous army of the Zapotec-speaking Emiliano Zapata during the Mexican Revolution 1910-1920; the Bolivian revolution of 1952; in Guatemala during the short-lived democratic period of the Arévalo and Arbenz governments between 1945 and 1954; and even more recently during the Zapatista uprising of 1994 which originally presented itself as a nationalist and *campesino*-based rebellion.⁴¹ The recent substantial increase in ethnic political organizing during the past three decades has directly challenged the established political parties throughout much of Latin America. Neither the political left nor the right have had much success in cultivating Indigenous support. Marxist parties have often been the most dismissive of Indigenous ethnicity due to ideologically-based fears that any ethnic accommodation threatens the unity of the peasantry and working class.⁴² The obvious result has been a clash between the renewal of Indigenous identities and liberal or socialist political parties.

Part III Obstacles to Electoral Participation:

As discussed previously in Part II, there have been periods in all of these regions where elections have been suspended completely due to war, civil conflict, or military coups. The following analysis of key obstacles will focus primarily on the systemic obstacles rather than specific historical events that interrupted the normal electoral

⁴¹ The first three revolutions were primarily class-based and this is particularly true for in Bolivia and Guatemala. For a detailed contrast of these respective revolutions as well as the Cold War policies of the Eisenhower administration towards them, please see Kenneth Lehman's "Revolutions and Attributions: Making Sense of Eisenhower Administration Policies in Bolivia and Guatemala" in *Diplomatic History*, Vol 21 (2), 1997, p. 185-213. Indigenous participation occurred as *campesinos* and workers with both revolutions promising improved social policy for the poor. Their social development strategies both emphasized integration through assimilation true to the ideology of Indigenismo (p. 185).

⁴² Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Indigenous Peoples and the State," in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 29-31.

system. We will begin our analysis with a look at how electoral laws can be manipulated in order to limit participatory democracy and the difficulty of asserting the right to vote when Indigenous and other rural citizens are not issued the required legal documents or internal passports necessary to cast a ballot. We will then proceed to some examples of how cooptation can infiltrate Indigenous political movements and thereby limit their effectiveness. Our next category of obstacles deals with the question of authentic or legitimate representation and the community divisions that can arise with the arrival of party politics. Finally, we will consider the impact of Indigenous peoples refusing to engage in state elections as symbolic protests.

Manipulation of Electoral Laws

Much is at stake in presidential elections due the highly centralized design of many Latin American states. Bolivia is arguably the most striking in its concentration of power in the hands of the president. One example is the method of selection for the country's president, a position of enormous importance because of its appointment powers. The president of Bolivia, as in Guatemala, chooses the regional governors with the consequence that winning the presidency determines not only the national but also the regional executive. The enormous importance of its presidency may offer some explanation for why Bolivia is arguably the most striking in its manipulation of the political process in order to disenfranchise its Indigenous majority. At least 50% of the popular vote is required to become president with the Bolivian congress appointing the winner should no candidate reach that threshold. Indigenous voters in Bolivia have made substantial inroads in municipal elections since the decentralization reforms that took place between 1993 and 1997 but the presidency remains an elusive political prize.

Until 1997, political parties tightly controlled the selection of candidates and rarely approved Indigenous candidates for congress or the presidency. In other words, one vote was cast for a political party's slate for all three posts with the obvious consequence that the Ladino population could effectively block Indigenous electoral participation unless it occurred under the Ladino-controlled political parties' banners. Therefore, it was impossible to vote separately for a congressional deputy, senator, and presidential candidates. This measure hurt candidates from small and poorly-financed political parties.

A related problem to the manipulation cited above involves those surrounding voter registration. For example, many Indigenous peoples are not registered to vote even though they have the legal right to do so. Often, those living in rural areas are not issued the necessary legal documents that are required when registering to vote. As recently as 1995, only 8% of Indigenous Bolivians were registered.⁴³ In Latin America there often exist serious logistical difficulties for getting out the Indigenous vote.⁴⁴ Guatemalan electoral law requires voter registration to be complete three months prior to Election Day and there are no provisions for absentee voting.⁴⁵ These two measures require advanced planning and make it extremely difficult for many Indigenous Guatemalans, many of whom are involved in seasonal labour away from their homes, to cast a ballot.

⁴³ Donna Lee Van Cott, "Constitutional Reform in the Andes" in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 27.

⁴⁴ These logistical challenges include the absence of polls in remote rural areas which effectively disenfranchise complete sectors of the population. June Nash, "The Reassertion of Indigenous Identity: Mayan Responses to State Intervention in Chiapas," in *Latin American Research Review*, 2000, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Common Borders – Elections in Latin America
http://www.commonborders.org/guatemala1999.htm#_Toc473088371
 Date Accessed: Nov. 30, 2004

Cooptation through Political Participation

Another factor that limits the impact of political participation is the cooptation of Indigenous elites. Indigenous organizations have frequently collaborated with colonizers when their original mandates became co-opted as they, or more precisely, their leaders, realized the potential benefits of aligning themselves with the forces they had originally been intended to challenge.

Anthony Hall describes this *comprador* phenomenon of colonization whereby

*...virtually all the colonial powers in the Americas have at different times used presents, medals, honours or outright bribery to engender dependencies and cultivate a class of Aboriginal leadership willing to collaborate in facilitating various forms of indirect rule on behalf of non-Aboriginal authority. Indeed, the manipulation of patronage to subvert, undermine, demoralize, or compromise the leadership and resistance...has long been a staple tactic of imperialists and empire builders around the world. It constitutes a facet in the exercise of power which, as Frantz Fanon and many others have observed, was integral to undermining the authenticity and legitimacy of the "decolonization" movements...*⁴⁶

Indigenous collaboration with colonial powers adds another layer of complexity to an analysis of meaningful Indigenous participation in national political institutions. For example, at the municipal level, many *caciques* or local bosses are Indigenous by culture, language, and race but serve the colonial government.⁴⁷ Even the election of President Toledo in Peru, widely trumpeted in the mass media as a breakthrough for ethnic pluralism in Latin America, is dismissed by Indigenous peoples who point to Toledo's education in the USA as proof that he has been assimilated. Collaboration of Indigenous leaders leads to yet another problem that can be crippling to liberal democracies:

⁴⁶ Anthony Hall, *The American Empire and the Fourth World* (Montréal/Kingston: McGill Queens University Press, 2004), p. 280-1.

⁴⁷ Víctor Montejo, "The Multiplicity of Mayan Voices – Mayan Leadership and the Politics of Self-Representation," in *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation, and the State in Latin America* (Kay Warren and Jean Jackson Editors), (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 141.

cynicism. Many countries are seeing reduced voter turnouts, raising fears that declining electoral participation will undermine the legitimacy of elected governments and thereby destabilize the entire political process. In a region of the world where democratic roots are not yet deep, public cynicism represents a serious threat to its survival.⁴⁸

Representation, Division and Party Politics

A related concept is that of “Representation” which refers to the process by which one is designated as a legitimate spokesperson for Indigenous communities. Representation has frequently been manipulated by colonial governments in order to reward compliance. The arrival of party politics in Indigenous communities has exacerbated the difficulty of determining who are the legitimate representatives. A useful Indian description of the new internal divisions that arrive with multi-party democracy notes “indigenous peoples, with no traditions of elections but of decision-making by consensus, have now been forced to choose one among many of their own contesting brothers by casting votes.”⁴⁹ Another difficulty may be the generational shift that has begun to occur in leadership roles as “young, Western-educated cultural brokers” have displaced “traditional spiritual elders.”⁵⁰ The splitting of community members by party lines into ideological camps has also been noted as a serious problem and partially explains why many Indigenous peoples have

⁴⁸ Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood, *Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity, and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 170.

⁴⁹ Samar Bosu Mullick, “Indigenous Peoples and Electoral Politics in India: An Experience of Incompatibility,” in *Challenging Politics: Indigenous Peoples’ Experiences with Political Parties and Elections* (Editor Kathrin Wessendorf), (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2001), p. 131.

⁵⁰ Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village – Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 39.

rejected electoral participation altogether.⁵¹ Indeed, Indigenous Latin Americans have often pointed to the arrival of political parties in their communities as the catalyst for conflict.⁵²

The question of representation is most germane when evaluating the direct participation of Indigenous candidates and political parties. Criollos (Europeans) and Mestizos have historically dominated political parties in Latin America.⁵³ These political parties have generally failed to resonate or appeal to potential Indigenous supporters. Yet Indigenous peoples are clearly increasing their visibility in Latin American electoral politics while developing their own unique political strategies and tactics.

Since the earliest years of the Katarista movement, the main indigenous campesino leaders agreed on the need to have their own “political wing” or political vehicle to separate from the criollo parties, which simply utilised the indigenous campesino movement (even though many of these leaders ultimately ended up in the political parties, given that this was the normal way of pursuing political objectives). Nonetheless, attempts to build such a political vehicle ended up committing the same errors as the criollo parties the movement so mistrusted; like them, they became characterised by undemocratic practices, authoritarianism, internal divisions, and personal interests.⁵⁴

In Bolivia, for example, there are several political parties with Indigenous leaders and followings including the Indigenous Pachacuti Movement (MIP), which competes for votes with the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS). The Indigenous of Bolivia have split

⁵¹ Rodolfo Stavenhagen, “Indigenous Movements and Politics in Mexico and Latin America” in *Aboriginal Rights and Self-Government: The Canadian and Mexican Experience in North American Perspective*, (Curtis Cook and Juan D. Lindau Editors), (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), p. 86.

⁵² Margarito Ruiz Hernández and Aracely Bргуete Cal y Mayor, “Indigenous Peoples Without Political Parties: The Dilemma of Indigenous Representation in Latin America,” in *Challenging Politics: Indigenous Peoples’ Experiences with Political Parties and Elections* (Editor Kathrin Wessendorf), (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2001), p. 30.

⁵³ Rodolfo Stavenhagen, “Indigenous Peoples and the State,” in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 26.

⁵⁴ Xavier Albó, “Indigenous Political Participation in Bolivia” in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 97.

their support between several political vehicles and it is unlikely that Indigenous peoples there, who see themselves not as one but rather many ethnic groups, will unite behind a single political party.⁵⁵ Indigenous electoral activism is most consolidated in Bolivia but rising levels of participation can also be found in Chiapas.

The outlook for Guatemala is somewhat more pessimistic.⁵⁶ Indigenous intellectuals in Guatemala have also called for the creation of a “Mayan political party (one not exclusive of Ladinos)” because “Maya have come to realize that they have been used by political parties.”⁵⁷ Indigenous political parties may not prove to be a panacea as the Bolivian case has already demonstrated their vulnerability to the same weaknesses that have plagued non-Indigenous political parties in Latin America. A disturbing trend is also evident in the growing number of voting abstentions in Guatemala where many Indigenous people remain afraid to vote after decades of repression and civil war.⁵⁸

Symbolic Protest and Election Boycotts

Indigenous non-participation in electoral politics is one example of how Indigenous peoples are shedding the legitimizing identities that nation-states seek to impose on them.

⁵⁵ Therefore, the political landscape will likely shift towards that of post-Apartheid South Africa where the African National Congress competes with the Inkatha Freedom Party for the support of native South Africans.

⁵⁶ Richard N. Adams notes that the “question of the relationship of Mayan activities to political parties leaves much to be desired. The only pro-Indian party, the National Front of Indigenous Integration (FIN) was founded in 1976 but...commands little attention.” Furthermore, all Mayan congress representatives were “elected as members of ladino parties, and claims to an exclusively Mayan constituency were far from clear.” “A Report on the Political Status of the Guatemalan Maya” in *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America*, Donna Lee Van Cott (Editor), (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), p. 172.

⁵⁷ Víctor Montejo, “The Multiplicity of Mayan Voices – Mayan Leadership and the Politics of Self-Representation,” in *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation, and the State in Latin America* (Kay Warren and Jean Jackson Editors), (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 146.

⁵⁸ Margarito Ruiz Hernández and Aracely Burguete Cal y Mayor, “Indigenous Peoples Without Political Parties: The Dilemma of Indigenous Representation in Latin America,” in *Challenging Politics: Indigenous Peoples’ Experiences with Political Parties and Elections* (Editor Kathrin Wessendorf), (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2001), p. 32.

Mohawk political scientist Taiaiake Alfred explains that, whether by criteria of principle or practicality, Indigenous participation in mainstream electoral politics is futile, and worse, a clear disavowal of Indigenous claims to autonomy and nationhood.⁵⁹ Alfred is referring specifically to Canada but his suspicions are shared in Latin America. The Zapatista movement in Chiapas has repeatedly called for boycotts of state and federal elections deemed as fraudulent. Indigenous Zapatista supporters disrupted the congressional and state elections in 1997 by “destroying polling stations in several districts in an attempt to have the elections nullified,” costing the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) public support because of its apparent “poor sportsmanship.”⁶⁰

In another symbolic condemnation of democracy in Chiapas and Mexico, the EZLN launched its own democratic consultations with citizens in 1996 and 1999 in the form of plebiscites to gauge public support for Zapatista strategies. Despite government efforts to downplay the process, more Chiapanecos participated in the March 1999 *Consulta* than had voted in the recent state elections, even despite the intimidation of Mexican army video surveillance at the *Consulta* polling stations.⁶¹ Unfortunately for the Zapatistas, the high turnout in Chiapas had no substantive impact on state policy.

More recently, other obstacles have emerged due to their lack of financial resources and technical expertise required to organize and promote independent Indigenous political parties. The result is that there have been many obstacles that have prevented or restricted Indigenous participation in electoral politics in these 3 regions. In

⁵⁹ Taiaiake Alfred, “Why Play the White Man’s Game?” in *Windspeaker*, October, 1999. <http://www.ammsa.com/windspeaker/windguest99.html#anchor244490>

⁶⁰ John Ross, *The War Against Oblivion: The Zapatista Chronicles*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2000, p. 142 & 224.

⁶¹ Chiapas tallied 461,000 votes while the previous election had recorded only 406,000. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

Part IV, we now contemplate the prospects for Indigenous peoples of Bolivia, Chiapas and Guatemala in future elections.

Part IV Indigenous Prospects in Electoral Politics

A survey of Indigenous participation in Latin American elections yields mixed results. Despite some initial successes in electoral political mobilization, an Indigenous political party governs no country in the Americas. Nonetheless, Indigenous peoples are increasing their political influence by voting, running for public office, and founding their own distinct political parties. Indigenous peoples are also organizing through ancient and new multinational alliances and confederacies. One of the largest is the *Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas* or Continental Network of Indigenous Women.⁶² Such alliances provide Indigenous peoples a potential foundation upon which to build powerful voting blocs. Nevertheless, this enormous Indigenous electoral potential in many countries has yet to be realized due to their inability to form effective ethnic voting blocs.

However, Indigenous political parties and organizations have been influential. In Bolivia, Victor Hugo Cardenas became vice-president and was involved in a series of key reforms. The current Bolivian president, Carlos Mesa, has survived largely due to the support of MAS which enjoys considerable indigenous support. Moreover, 50 of the 130 deputies in the Bolivian Congress are themselves Indigenous with most of these deputies members of MAS or MIP.⁶³ Elsewhere, Guatemala has a Mayan Education Minister and Chiapas recently witnessed political openings as the PRI yielded the Mexican presidency

⁶² The *Enlace* includes Indigenous women's organizations from Canada, México, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panamá, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. Similar networks of distinct Indigenous nations exist within each of these countries <http://enlace.nativeweb.org/organ.htm>

⁶³ Editorial, "Indigenous People in South America – A Political Awakening" in *The Economist*, Feb. 21, 2004, p. 36.

and the state governorship. Increasing numbers of Indigenous parliamentarians are being elected but their primary allegiance tends to be party-based rather than ethnic.⁶⁴ A recent example was the unsuccessful attempt by Indigenous parliamentarians in Bolivia to create and maintain an Indigenous Parliamentary Brigade that would allow them to cross party lines in ethnic cooperation.⁶⁵

These trends can also be seen elsewhere in Latin America. In Ecuador, the main Indigenous organization, CONAIE, allied itself with the military to depose an unpopular president. Although the coup can be justifiably argued as antithetical to democracy, it remains an unorthodox example of how Indigenous peoples are impacting the electoral process. The main Indigenous political party in Ecuador, Pachakutik, was initially a key member in the governing coalition that took office in January 2003.⁶⁶ In sum, the Indigenous peoples of Latin America have had varying degrees of success making it difficult to discern the necessary conditions for them to secure their demands in multi-party democracies.

Demographics and Electoral Outcomes

Donna Lee Van Cott posits that population size is not a determining factor in the achievement of favourable results by the ballot. For example, she contrasts the cases of Colombia and Ecuador, which have Indigenous populations of 3% and 40% respectively

⁶⁴ Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Indigenous Peoples and the State," in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 34.

⁶⁵ Xavier Albó, "Indigenous Political Participation in Bolivia" in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 94-96.

⁶⁶ Michael Shifter, "Breakdown in the Andes," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 83 (2), 2004, p. 131.

but have both secured state recognition of Indigenous autonomous zones through their participation in electoral politics.⁶⁷ In both cases, unstable political situations meant that brokerage politics allowed for an Indigenous agenda to be brought forward and receive sufficient support. Alison Brysk shares this assessment when she observes that Amazonian Indigenous peoples have had a greater electoral impact than highland groups despite their numerical inferiority.⁶⁸ Van Cott also points to Bolivia as the country with perhaps the best opportunity for Indigenous self-determination at the ballot box: “the size of the indigenous population in Bolivia provides an opportunity for Indians to fulfil their autonomy aspirations through electoral victories at the local level if they can overcome the extreme imbalance in organisational and financial resources relative to those of local elites.”⁶⁹

Debating Indigenous Resurgence

The rise of ethnic nationalism has been met with both internal and external criticism. The rise of “ethnicism” or ethnic politics has been attacked as a right-wing conspiracy to divide the left into ethnic factions.⁷⁰ Fear mongering of “balkanization” and ensuing civil strife has been used to undermine Indigenous autonomy demands. Indigenous

⁶⁷ “In general, it is difficult to discern any systematic way in which the proportional size of the indigenous population influenced the scope of ethnic autonomy rights recognised and their successful implementation.” Donna Lee Van Cott, “Constitutional Reform in the Andes” in *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Rachel Sieder (Editor), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 68-69.

⁶⁸ Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village – Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 32.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷⁰ For example, see Hector Díaz Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1997), p. 73-75.

intellectuals and political leaders have responded with exaggerated demonstrations of patriotic loyalty.⁷¹

A more sympathetic critique supports the principles of Indigenous self-determination but rejects the means of achieving this project. Hector Díaz Polanco criticizes its “opaque, naïve, and mystified vision raised to the level of ‘political project,’ a cunning exploitation of Indian consciousness.”

*The ethnicist does not perform the task that Gramsci assigns intellectuals, that is, constructing from social conditions a theoretical-political scheme capable of critically capturing the complexity of a given movement and suggesting a historical utopia that overcomes them. Rather, they convert the most elementary ingredients of ethnopopular perception (a mixture of deaf rancor, inverted ethnocentrism, a tendency toward withdrawal, autistic fantasies, the search for solutions in the past, and so on) into a political theory that results in not only an arbitrary and paralyzing utopia but also all kinds of obstacles to the coordination of the struggles of ethnic communities and other social forces interested against the national arrangement that is the basis for sociocultural discrimination and the promoter of the ethnophagic process.*⁷²

Díaz Polanco’s hypothesis that alliance-building is hindered by the rise of ethnicism challenges the premise that electoral decolonization is a viable option for Indigenous Latin America. He argues that ethnicism is fatally hindered by internal contradictions, including a false dichotomy between “Indigenous” and “Western”, that therefore reject the very notion of the nation-state as a Western construct. By rejecting the nation-state, ethnicists thereby prevent alliances between Indigenous and other elements of civil society that could assist in the state’s decolonization. The fundamental contradiction emerges between rejection of the nation-state juxtaposed with the desire for self-determination.

⁷¹ “Maya do not want to isolate themselves into little nation-states. We do not need to create a new Yugoslavia or replicate the ethnic warfare and tribal conflicts raging on the African continent. All Guatemalans, Mayan and non-Mayan, must work toward the construction of a pluralistic Guatemalan nation-state.” Víctor Montejo, “The Multiplicity of Mayan Voices – Mayan Leadership and the Politics of Self-Representation,” in *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation, and the State in Latin America* (Kay Warren and Jean Jackson Editors), (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 145.

⁷² Hector Díaz Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1997), p. 74.

Díaz Polanco's insights risk denunciation as paternalistic and evolutionary when he suggests that Indigenous peoples must achieve a "certain maturity" and a "certain degree of development of the consciousness" to overcome their lack of "global perspective and critical discernment".⁷³ Such statements demonstrate a surprising lack of sensitivity from a scholar who otherwise demonstrates impressive understanding of the Indigenous situation in Latin America. Nonetheless, his lack of diplomacy does not dismiss the real risks he has outlined should Indigenous peoples fail to ally themselves with other sectors of civil society.

Directions for Future Research: Searching for Solutions

Our original research questions sought to identify obstacles and comprehend the frustrating underperformance of Indigenous peoples in state elections in Bolivia, Guatemala and Chiapas. The above examples cited in Part II and III of this paper lead to a rich variety of other research questions. How can Indigenous peoples resurrect and strengthen existing alliances as well as create new ones? Are political parties an appropriate vehicle for Indigenous aspirations? What organizational structures (if any) can increase Indigenous representation but prevent the cooptation of Indigenous individuals and organizations?⁷⁴ Can true self-determination occur within the confines of a nation-state? Also, how will minority rights be instituted to ensure the protection of non-Indigenous citizens of nation-states that are controlled by Indigenous majorities? This last question clearly shows that

⁷³ Hector Díaz Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1997), p. 75.

⁷⁴ I explored this phenomenon during my MA thesis by noting the EZLN's antidote to cooptation by following its guiding principle of "Mandar Obediéndolo" or "Leading by Obeying." The EZLN implemented this principle by frequently consulting with its constituent communities, hiding the identities of its leadership, and refusing to conduct secret or closed negotiations with the Mexican government. Other methods of thwarting cooptation will be sought out during this research project.

the larger question of balancing autonomy and democracy will remain in any state where Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations coexist. Whichever group is the minority, autonomy and democracy provide an arrangement by which inequality and subordination subside until they, ultimately and “utopically”, disappear.

Conclusion

The political marginalization of the Indigenous populations of Bolivia, Guatemala, and Chiapas, Mexico, goes against one of the core tenets of liberal democratic ideology, which asserts that a plurality of voters will determine a given polity’s course of action. In the case of the 1999 Guatemalan referendum on Indigenous rights, proponents of expanded Indigenous recognition were defeated 47% to 53%.⁷⁵ Only 18% of eligible voters bothered to submit a ballot. The Guatemalan Indigenous leadership blamed this low rate of voter turnout to “poor political organization, mistrust of the government, and the fact that information about the referendum was available only in Spanish and not in native languages.”⁷⁶ Although the intention is not to end on a note of cynicism, this example clearly demonstrates that political organizing to contest state elections remains a formidable challenge for Indigenous Latin America. As a result, Indigenous self-determination by electoral means may remain elusive for many years to come. Nevertheless, one analyst assures that “the emergence of a politically effective

⁷⁵ Only one in five eligible voters cast ballots. For a detailed analysis of the referendum’s results, see Kay B. Warren, “Voting against Indigenous rights in Guatemala,” in *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation, and the State in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 149-180.

⁷⁶ “Guatemala.” *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2001*. © 1993-2000 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Mayan population is only a matter of time.”⁷⁷ I share this optimism for a continued trend of increased electoral participation by all Indigenous peoples throughout Latin America.

⁷⁷ Richard N. Adams, “A Report on the Political Status of the Guatemalan Maya,” in *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America*, Donna Lee Van Cott (Editor), (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), p. 177.

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