



DOING DEMOCRACY DIFFERENTLY: INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND REPRESENTATION IN CANADA AND LATIN AMERICA

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CONCLUSION

Instituting Indigenous and Democratic Governance Innovations

Settler colonialism is a structure—an organizing principle—that has been harmful to Indigenous communities throughout the Americas. This book set out to understand how to decolonize our democracies based on the insights and experiences of powerful and inspiring Indigenous movements in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nunavut, and Yukon—arguably the most successful cases of the institutional pathway to Indigenous autonomy and self-government in the Americas. In so doing, I have taken up the call of Abele and Prince (2006, 572) “to encourage others to give consideration to this issue and to these models.” The four models of Indigenous autonomy and self-government highlighted in this book have proven to be important clarifying devices allowing us to compare approaches to self-determination across wide variations in levels of social and economic development, welfare states, democratic traditions, political cultures, and histories. As I conclude this study, however, there remain two pressing questions: What are the factors that produce distinctive pathways to Indigenous autonomy and self-government, and ultimately, to democratic decolonization? And what are the possibilities for change beyond the state? Based on the case study evidence presented in previous chapters, I might venture a few tentative answers.

The findings of this study speak to some of the thorniest issues in democratic governance. Among the most pressing problems facing contemporary democracies is the accommodation of Indigenous peoples’ rights, interests, and aspirations (White 2020). Indigenous movements are pushing the democratic envelope in a way that ensures greater inclusion and participation for some of society’s most marginalized groups. A central objective of the book has been to assess whether Indigenous-state relations are improving in the cases under consideration on the basis of mutual recognition and respect.

For the most part, I have found that they have improved in the cases of Bolivia, Nunavut, and Yukon, and to a lesser extent in the case of Ecuador, though the results remain partial and uneven. The study also revealed the myriad ways that states have attempted to address demands for democratic decolonization by constraining them to fit within the confines of liberal institutions. These findings highlight a key paradox of the process of democratic decolonization—the tension between the desire to uproot colonialism and its legacies and the use of liberal state mechanisms to do so (Eversole 2010; Postero 2017). The examples of Indigenous and democratic governance innovation explored in the book, ranging from wildlife co-management boards to Indigenous-run state institutions, indicate that it is possible for Indigenous peoples to realize an important measure of self-determination within the institutional contexts and state structures in which they live. However, these hard-won spaces of autonomy are subject to reversals and rollbacks by the state unless closely monitored and constantly challenged by Indigenous movements and organizations.

This concluding chapter begins with an analysis of the factors that led to the different pathways to Indigenous autonomy and self-government in the book's comparative case studies. Case-specific combinations of structural, institutional, and agency-oriented factors are suggested to have shaped the particular model of Indigenous autonomy in each instance. The next section of the chapter addresses the democratic implications of Indigenous demands for autonomy and self-government. This section also revisits the question posed in the book's introduction on how the project of decolonization unsettles the practice of democracy. Based on case study findings, I argue that the promotion of Indigenous rights and representation does not undermine democracy or the state—it may in fact strengthen them. The final section of the chapter looks at potential alternative pathways to bring about change, as well as future research agendas in comparative and Indigenous political inquiry.

Institutional Pathways to Indigenous Autonomy and Self-Government

The four models of Indigenous autonomy and self-government featured in this book embody different power relations between Indigenous peoples and the state. Yukon's nation-to-nation approach to self-government is based on bilateral relations between individual First Nations and the federal government in which the powers of Indigenous self-determination are generally recognized

as deriving outside of and prior to the Canadian state (Abele and Prince 2006, 580). In many respects, this model represents the ideal institutional arrangement. In contrast, Bolivia's third-order approach and Nunavut's public government model are based on differing degrees of Indigenous self-governing power within the state. In both cases, Indigenous peoples exercise a strong measure of control over their own affairs, but only up until a certain point or state-imposed limit. Lastly, Ecuador's local or municipal-style approach to autonomy and self-government is predicated on powers of self-determination that are under the authority and control of the state. According to Abele and Prince (2006, 585), the mini-municipality model represents the least desirable form of Indigenous autonomy and self-government. Given that each of these models contains different possibilities for and constraints on self-determination, how did Bolivia, Ecuador, Nunavut, and Yukon end up with their particular model of Indigenous autonomy and self-government? I propose that the outcomes of Indigenous struggles for autonomy and self-government examined in this study can in large part be explained by three main factors: (a) the choices and preferences of the actors themselves; (b) the willingness of the state to share power with Indigenous peoples; and (c) the availability of power-sharing institutions.

In Nunavut and Yukon, the state was highly motivated to negotiate with Inuit and First Nations over outstanding land claims. In contrast to most Canadian provinces in the South, Indigenous peoples throughout much of the North did not sign historical treaties with the Crown, nor did they receive reserve lands (Cameron and White 1995; White 2020). As a result, Indigenous peoples in these regions are eligible to negotiate comprehensive land claims—modern-day treaties—with greater potential for significant powers of self-determination. Alcantara (2013, 81) has suggested that the federal government, which in the late 1970s became interested in settling northern land claims as a means to develop the region's natural resources, was under the impression that Yukon First Nations were likely to complete an agreement quickly and in accordance with the preferences of the Canadian government. Instead, as chapter 2 revealed, Yukon First Nations became involved in a protracted negotiation process that broke down at one point over the federal government's proposed third-order model of self-government. Yukon First Nations, who have a history of distinct identities and a desire for self-government that reflect these distinctions, held out until they achieved the greatest possible degree of Indigenous autonomy and self-government under a nation-to-nation model.

In contrast, in Nunavut, Indigenous peoples expressed a clear preference for exercising their powers of self-determination within the state in exchange for the creation of a new territory. As chapter 4 outlined, Nunavut's public government model works to advance Indigenous autonomy and self-government as the demographic superiority of the Inuit population ensures effective Indigenous control over the territorial government.

In Bolivia and Ecuador, where there is no history of treaty relations between Indigenous peoples and the state, Indigenous peoples pursued plurinationality through constitutional reform. The essence of plurinationality is the sharing of power (Resina de la Fuente 2012, 154). By choosing the electoral path to change, Indigenous movements in both countries opted to work within the institutions of the state. As detailed in chapter 3, Bolivia's Indigenous-backed Movement toward Socialism managed to project itself onto the national political stage during a period of intense social mobilization in the early 2000s. Under the leadership of the country's first Indigenous president, Evo Morales, Indigenous peoples attained the maximum degree of power within the state through a third-order model of Indigenous autonomy and self-government. In contrast, in Ecuador, social mobilization against neoliberalism led to the election of the populist and left-leaning presidency of Rafael Correa, a non-Indigenous politician. Correa's technocratic approach to policy-making, detailed in chapter 5, resulted in the implementation of some of the Indigenous movement's central demands while undermining the role of Indigenous peoples in Ecuadorian politics and society. Despite a constitutional commitment to Indigenous self-government, not one Indigenous Territorial Circumscription has yet been established. Instead, the Indigenous movement has sought a measure of autonomy through locally elected governments. Clearly, Ecuador's model of Indigenous autonomy and self-government does not meet the preferences and expectations of the country's once-powerful Indigenous movement. However, the recent resurgence of widespread Indigenous mobilization and the return of the Indigenous-based Pachakutik party as a viable electoral option indicates that a more transformational model of Indigenous autonomy and self-government may one day be possible.

Indigenous Politics and Democratic Decolonization

What are the democratic implications of Indigenous demands for autonomy and self-government? The rise of Indigenous peoples as important new social and political actors is a positive trend in contemporary democracies. Rather

than seeking to overthrow the state, Indigenous activists and movements are looking to transform state power and, in so doing, reform democracy to make it fit their hopes and dreams (Cairns 2000; Yashar 1999). A major theme that has arisen out of this study is the vibrancy of Indigenous politics, in relation to and beyond the state. Indigenous leaders in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nunavut, and Yukon play a dual political role in their respective societies—nurturing their internal capacities of self-governance while engaging with the institutional processes of settler states. This difficult balancing act is an essential ingredient for democratic decolonization. The outcome of the unique approaches to Indigenous autonomy and self-government being taken in northern Canada and the central Andes is the blending of classical features of liberal democracy with new institutional arrangements arising from the distinct societies and cultures in these regions (Cameron and White 1995). Liberal or representative democracy is far more flexible and adaptable than is normally assumed. The findings presented in this book challenge the notion that there is a single liberal end point to democratic development or one superior model of democracy—rather, as these case studies have shown, there are many variations and pathways to greater democratization (O’Donnell 2010).

The experiences of democratic decolonization explored in this book suggest that one of the ways that decolonization unsettles the practice of democracy is by placing new demands on the political system. The inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the structures of the state has opened up the policy-making process to citizen participation, deliberation, and decision making, and promoted the growth of new forms of society-centred governance (Merino 2021; White 2020). Indigenous self-government arrangements of the varieties examined here have resulted in more complex forms of governance in Canada and Latin America that have ultimately made democracy more meaningful for its citizens. Indigenous movements in these regions have also pressured states to recognize and institutionalize a more differentiated citizenship regime, one that can accommodate both individual and collective rights (Oxhorn 2011; Yashar 2005). As such, Indigenous politics is effecting a fundamental rethinking of the homogenizing and liberal underpinnings of citizenship regimes and the state as part of its “postliberal challenge” (Yashar 2005). According to Yashar (2005, 285–6), “Viewed as a whole, the postliberal challenge compels us to consider the coexistence of multiple national identities associated with national citizenship, multiple modes of interest intermediations, and multiple institutional sites formally vested with political

power and jurisdiction.” In short, Indigenous politics has breathed diversity into our democratic ideas, practices, and processes, expanding our political imagination beyond the state (Picq 2017).

The final theme that has emerged out of this book is how participation in institutionalized politics affects Indigenous activism, as well as how activists change democratic institutions. As the case studies in this book have demonstrated, protest broadens and expands democracy by including new actors, issues, and agendas in the political system. The combination of electoral participation and protest politics that is the hallmark of Indigenous political dynamics in Bolivia and Ecuador, and to a lesser extent in Nunavut and Yukon, has served to create important windows of opportunity for institutional change in these cases. Indigenous activists have capitalized on these political openings by introducing key governance innovations into their respective political systems, including, for example, the recognition of the rights of Nature, reserved seats for Indigenous people, official use of Indigenous languages, and the introduction of legal pluralism. As Montúfar (2006) reminds us, while agents of representative democracy tend to prefer the status quo, civil society actors are more likely to propose and act on new initiatives. By channelling Indigenous demands into the political system, governments in northern Canada and the central Andes have enhanced their democratic performance and legitimacy.

Possibilities for Change beyond the State

The case studies presented in this book do not represent the only possibility or pathway to effect change in contemporary democracies. Alternatives to institutional participation abound in the Americas. A central dilemma faced by Indigenous movements is whether to retain an oppositional stance to their respective political systems or to try to bring about change by way of the democratic mechanisms already in place (Rice 2012; Yashar 2005). An institutional strategy is conventionally assumed to risk the loss of movement legitimacy and autonomy as Indigenous groups submit themselves to the rules and regulations of the largely alien political system that has long served as an instrument of domination and oppression (Ladner 2003; Massal and Bonilla 2000). In the words of Indigenous scholar and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017, 50), “I am not interested in inclusion. I am not interested in reconciling. I’m interested in unapologetic place-based nationhoods using Indigenous practices and operating in an ethical and principled way from an

intact land base.” Likewise, Taiaiake Alfred (2005) has suggested that statist solutions, such as self-government and land claims agreements, are aspects of a “politics of pity.” According to Alfred (2005, 20), “Conventional and acceptable approaches to making change are leading us nowhere.”

In Canada, distinct relationships between Indigenous peoples and the state have shaped differing stances on the merits and limits of engaging with the institutions of the settler state. While First Nations tend to seek nation-to-nation political relations with the state, others, such as Inuit and Métis, have historically been more willing to participate in Canadian political institutions (Cairns 2000; Papillon 2008). The political behaviour of Indigenous groups also varies tremendously across provinces and territories. For instance, in northern Canada, where Indigenous candidates compete in elections, turnout rates of Indigenous voters often exceed those of non-Indigenous residents; whereas in southern Canada, the stronger discourse on Indigenous nationalism that permeates Indigenous communities results in lower levels of electoral participation (Guérin 2003; Ladner 2003). Indigenous scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) has argued that the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state remains colonial to its core despite the presence of a wide range of recognition-based mechanisms to address concerns related to Indigenous rights within the political system.

In Latin America, Indigenous peoples have turned their backs on electoral politics as a means of advancing the Indigenous agenda most notably in Mexico and Guatemala. In Mexico, the Indigenous-based Zapatista Army of National Liberation distanced itself from the state and mainstream political parties following the breakdown of negotiations in the mid-1990s over issues of autonomy and self-government within Indigenous communities. The Zapatistas have instead turned inward in an attempt to build *de facto* autonomous communities, largely isolating the Indigenous cause from the national political agenda (Gómez Tagle 2005; Nash 2001). In Guatemala, Indigenous communities voted down a proposed constitutional amendment that included the recognition of Indigenous rights in the referendum of 1999. Although there was considerable variation among rural and urban voters, Warren (2002) has suggested that the no vote on the part of Maya communities reflected their skepticism of the electoral process as an effective means of bringing about change. Instead, Mayas are working to find alternative avenues of political influence by building a grassroots movement based on cultural revitalization. While alternative approaches or pathways to Indigenous

autonomy and self-government are beyond the scope of this study, they are important to take into consideration when doing democracy differently.

Looking Ahead

The findings of this study offer important takeaways for political science. Echoing Falleti (2021), our discipline needs to devote more attention and resources to the study of Indigenous politics or risk missing the transformations that Indigenous peoples are bringing about, from the local level to the international arena. The study of institutions has long been a mainstay of political science research. Yet, the concern with formal institutions and the measurement of attitudes regarding these institutions are insufficient to understand the contributions that Indigenous peoples are making to the study of politics and power (Deloria and Wilkins 1999). As Cameron (2018) has so aptly pointed out, our political institutions are failing to respond to some of the biggest challenges of our times. Keme (2018) has suggested that the colonial logic that erases Indigenous peoples persists as a central organizing principle of states and their hegemonic institutions. A new research agenda on political institutions is desperately needed—one that can address certain crucial questions: Whose interests do our political institutions serve? Whose rights do they protect and enforce? And how can their failings be addressed so that they come to serve different purposes? By paying greater attention to such areas of study as Indigenous law, nationalism, sovereignty, and land-based politics, we would greatly expand the conceptual resources available to the discipline of political science (Ferguson 2006).

A critical insight of this study is the importance of Indigenous ownership and control over surface and subsurface natural resources for experiments in Indigenous autonomy and self-government to flourish. The strong overlap between mineral deposit locations and Indigenous communities in Canada and Latin America ensures that the intersection of Indigenous rights and extractive industry will be a critical avenue of comparative research in the years to come (Rice 2019; Szablowski 2010). There are also interesting parallels between Indigenous-corporate partnerships in the resource sector in Canada's northern territories and Latin America's model of progressive extractivism that warrant greater analytical attention (Bernauer 2019b; Keely and Sandlos 2015). More research is needed on the convergence of Indigenous and environmental activism in response to extractive activities (Clapperton and Piper 2019; Eisenstadt and Jones West 2019), as well as the increasing

criminalization of these protest actions (Arce and Nieto-Matiz 2024; Lindt 2023). The transnational dimension of Indigenous movement struggles is also a neglected area of research (Silva 2013), as are the political consequences of social protest (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016). A new research agenda that addresses whether or not Indigenous protests against extractive industry operations lead to policy changes, for instance, would do much to advance the literature on Indigenous politics. The results of this research agenda would have relevance to ongoing scholarly debates as well as practical implications for policy-making.

Doing democracy differently also means doing better by Indigenous women. More comparative research is needed on Indigenous self-determination, governance, and gender, including the tensions between collective and individual rights to autonomy (Kuokkanen 2019). We still know comparatively little about the internal dynamics of Indigenous movements and organizations. Recent work on Indigenous women's movements is beginning to pry open the black box of Indigenous mobilization to reveal important gendered dynamics (Hernández Castillo and Speed 2006; Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017). Research in this area has also begun to address the pressing issue of the causes and consequences of violence against Indigenous women in Canada and Latin America (García Del Moral 2018; Sieder 2011). Despite recent legal and constitutional gains, Indigenous women continue to face gendered violence from public and private actors, as well as from their own domestic partners (Speed 2016). Indigenous women are often at the forefront of violent confrontations with state and private security forces seeking to evict them from their lands to make way for economic development projects (Arteaga Böhrst 2023; Figueroa Romero and Hernández Pérez 2023; Fregoso and Bejarano 2009). Violence against Indigenous women is a multi-faceted problem, requiring a multi-faceted solution. More research is needed on how to design effective strategies for the prevention and elimination of gendered and colonial violence, including alternative solutions based on cultural models of dialogue and reparations as a means to guarantee access to justice (Guimont Marceau et al. 2020). Future research must tell these stories.

Conclusion

On a practical level, all states in the Americas are grappling with the issue of Indigenous autonomy and self-government. Accordingly, this book speaks to some of the practical aspects of implementing Indigenous self-governance in

Canada and Latin America, as well as some of the theoretical and normative questions about democratic possibilities and the kind of society in which we wish to live (Cameron 2018). The emergence of powerful Indigenous rights movements should be viewed as an opportunity to deepen the regions' democracies. Indigenous political engagement is challenging exclusionary state structures and highlighting the failure to incorporate, represent, and respond to important segments of the population. Indigenous movements in the cases examined in this book have sought to transform the nature of state power. In Canada, the experiments in diversifying democracy that are taking place in the northern territories have the potential to spark innovation in the southern provinces and beyond. In Latin America, the demand for plurinationality that originated in the central Andes and that is now spreading to neighbouring countries may be a means to improve democratic participation and inclusion in the region. This will surely benefit Indigenous communities as well as serve the interests of the broader society.

The major appeal of the structured, focused comparative approach employed in this study—based on a variation of the “most different systems” research design involving the study of similarities across structurally different cases—is that it is capable of producing broad generalizations on Indigenous politics (Collier and Mahoney 1996). The case studies analyzed in the book reveal a number of lessons that may be relevant to Indigenous movements and organizations elsewhere. First and foremost, participation in party politics and the pursuit of Indigenous autonomy and self-government are not mutually exclusive endeavours. The positive institutional outcomes of Indigenous rights struggles in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nunavut, and Yukon demonstrate the potential for accomplishing Indigenous agendas by way of democratic mechanisms. Second, building nation-to-nation relationships between Indigenous peoples and settler states requires constructing institutions that are both culturally appropriate and shared. Improving Indigenous-state relations demands a willingness to work together and to share obligations and responsibilities on the part of Indigenous and settler governments. Lastly, ongoing Indigenous mobilization is needed to close the gap between official discourse and practice on Indigenous rights and representation that exists in contemporary democracies. My hope for this book is that it generates bold new questions and approaches in the study of comparative and Indigenous politics that will serve the needs of academics and activists alike.