

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the special issue on indigenous politics

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What is Indigenous Politics?

At its core, Indigenous politics reflects the adaptability and resilience of Native governments, people, and nations, and the failure of powerful states to assimilate Indigenous people into broader society. In the United States and around the world, democratic and non-democratic regimes of settler-colonial states were predicated on the assimilation of Native people and the disappearance of Indigenous governments through political, legal or extralegal means. Yet contrary to predictions, and indeed expectations among many non-Indigenous leaders that Native people would cease to exist or simply meld into mainstream society, Native peoples have not just survived, but thrived in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The articles in this special issue show how Indigenous peoples and political leaders around the world are engaged in politics and policymaking, and negotiating power, at the local, regional, national, and international levels. For scholars of Indigenous politics, the research presented in this special issue is further confirmation of the quality and scope of the work already underway. For those less familiar with Indigenous research, this special issue provides a first look at the depth and breadth of an often underexamined area of political research. It also serves as an invitation to include Indigenous politics in all areas of political science.

The study of Indigenous politics is the study of power and survivance. Indigenous peoples have long faced powerful political actors who would benefit from their eradication, either from their very presence in society or as actors in the political process. Yet there is far more to Indigenous peoples and Indigenous politics than bare survival. Indigenous politics is creative and unsettling, embodying the power of resistance. It is in line with Gerald Vizenor's definition of Native *survivance* where he sees "native presence and actuality over absence, nihility and victimry" (2008, 1). The fusion of survival and resistance generates politics that are dynamic, not merely historic or reactive. Native survivance includes active defiance of "absence, deracination, and oblivion" (2008, 85). Survivance also entails a healthy "mockery of dogged academics" and other outsiders who let their expectations get in the way of actual observation (2008, 2). To borrow from Philip Deloria's phrasing, Native peoples are in unexpected places, doing unexpected politics. As a result, non-Indigenous

peoples (and non-Indigenous academics) regularly find Indigenous politics to be surprising (Rubertone, 2020).

As the articles in this issue highlight, survivance is ever present with Indigenous people, groups, and governments actively engaged in politics at multiple levels, around the world. These ongoing and everchanging encounters with other political actors and institutions speak to the breadth of activity that must be better understood to get a full picture of political science. Nowhere is this more clearly articulated than in Cobb's (2007) discussion of American Indian politics and activism. Cobb emphasizes the necessity to explore Indigenous politics through the lens of political encounters. Indigenous politics must be understood as "mutual, reciprocal—two-way rather than one-way streets" (Cobb, 2007, 58–59). Only then will scholars be able to explore the dynamics of power relationships among various Indigenous and non-Indigenous players over time; to recognize the agency of all those involved; and to identify how these relationships shift and change with social, economic, cultural, and political contexts (Cobb, 65). Importantly, an encounters approach is retrospective, current, and prospective. Encounters are both proactive and reactive to the political environment. To best understand Indigenous politics and Indigenous survivance, past, present and future political encounters must be incorporated into our understanding of politics.

The articles in this special issue add to our understanding of Indigenous encounters as survivance, political science, and the politics of survivance, often contributing in multiple ways. Phan and Lee (2022) compare and contrast ideas of Native Hawaiian identity and national identity to establish Indigenous self-identification as central to decolonizing political power and political science research. This innovative and Indigenous informed methodology for quantitative research invites Native participation and cooperation. It also raises important issues about how Natives define themselves in relation to others and has been informed by both historical and contemporary encounters with non-Natives, the state of Hawaii, and the United States. Identity, claiming space, and establishing a presence is also central in Komai (2022). Komai identifies Indigenous Ainu efforts in Japan to negotiate power and create space within existing institutions to push back against dispossession, assimilation, and colonization. These encounters are current efforts to address historical wrongs, examples of Indigenous survivance.

Other articles raise similar issues about legacies of settler colonialism, its tremendous impact on Indigenous politics (Barreto *et al.*, 2022; Beauvais, 2022; Foxworth and Boulding, 2022), Indigenous political participation and political knowledge (Koch, 2022) and efforts of Indigenous groups to exert power within existing political structures (Carlson, 2022). For Foxworth and Boulding (2022), survivance stands front and center as competing stereotypical images of Native people as either savage or spiritual, reinforce settler-colonial images and beliefs about Indigenous populations. Their research shows how past encounters continue to shape present relationships among Natives and non-Natives. Native peoples have to overcome the mistaken belief that they are historical figures in a romanticized world and continually reassert their existence as contemporary, living peoples. Foxworth and Boulding show how historicized stereotypes, along with political ideology, explain whether non-Natives acknowledge Native discrimination or view Native populations with increasing levels of resentment. The stereotype-based expectations of Indigenous people inhibit non-Natives from

observing and acknowledging Indigenous presence as it exists in contemporary society and politics.

Beauvais expands on the insights in Foxworth and Boulding about how past encounters affect Native survivance by revealing the link between negative stereotypes and resentment towards Native peoples and policymaking. For Beauvais (2022), a newly created measure of Indigenous resentment expands our understanding of how anti-Indigenous attitudes impact support for public policy. Using responses to questions regarding Aboriginals in Canada, stereotyping and racial resentment emerge as key predictors of opposition to welfare laws and support for pipeline development, both issues linked to Indigenous populations.

Read together, Foxworth and Boulding and Beauvais reveal how the legacy of past policies of dispossession and erasure contribute to non-Native discomfort with Indigenous peoples and politics in the present. Again, discomfort over Indigenous presence and actuality emerge as Indigenous people have not disappeared nor are they reducible to stereotypes (Vizenor, 2008) but are adapting to the political world and exercising power despite anti-Indigenous attitudes.

Other articles investigate how Indigenous peoples creatively adapt, resist, and negotiate current encounters with the non-Indigenous states and publics. Barreto, Sanchez and Walker (2022) illustrate the legacy of past encounters on current Indigenous politics through their examination of a settler state government's efforts to limit the influence of Indigenous peoples as voters. By linking residency, as defined by the state of North Dakota, to a valid piece of identification required for voting, historical wrongs of removal and confinement are used in the present to limit the rights of Native people to exercise political power. The explanation for the enactment of these laws also lies in the influence that Native voters have had in recent closely contested elections. Their work emphasizes the dynamic nature of Indigenous encounters and the need to understand Indigenous politics as an ongoing, evolving process that acts and reacts to the efforts of non-Indigenous actors (Cobb, 2007).

Koch (2022) explores how Native Americans perceive their relationship with the state by focusing on individual-level factors that influence voter registration rates and levels of political knowledge among Native Americans. His work highlights how Native encounters with the state influence Native participation in mainstream U.S. elections. He finds that Native voters like other historically marginalized groups, including Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics, generally have lower levels of voter registration and political knowledge than Caucasians. Native encounters with the United States, however, significantly increased political knowledge and voter registration. Natives that identified as serving in the military had significantly higher levels of political knowledge and voter registration. Native respondents under the age of 40 years old also reported significantly higher levels of voter registration than in older generations. An increase in voter registration among younger Natives likely signals that they are more likely to vote in upcoming and subsequent elections as they have passed an initial hurdle in the political process. These findings are in line with Vizenor's (2008) model of survivance as Indigenous people in the U.S. are opting into military service and active in the political process. This presence and actuality in the electoral process then generates state pushback, like efforts to disenfranchise Native voters in ND (Barreto *et al.*, 2022).

Komai (2022) and Carlson (2022) examine how tribal governments and Native organizations, like individual Natives, negotiate and renegotiate political power and space. They build on Barreto, Sanchez and Walker and Koch's important work on individual political participation by Indigenous peoples by emphasizing the collective nature of Indigenous politics. Carlson (2022), in particular, focuses on the role of Indigenous peoples as governments negotiating with the political officials of another government. Similarly, Komai demonstrates how Indigenous peoples use collective organizations to create further opportunities for their own forms of self-determination. Both expand on existing understandings of political participation by highlighting the many ways that Indigenous peoples collectively interact with other political actors. These articles show that electoral efforts are important, but only one of the myriad ways that Indigenous peoples engage in political processes.

The clearest example of encounters by tribal governments among the articles that follow explores American Indian opposition to the legislation in the United States Congress (Carlson, 2022). Carlson lays out how interest groups strategies are employed by tribal governments and organizations to block legislation harmful to their interests. This approach is important to Indigenous peoples as they engage in the legislative process, both as individuals and governments, at the time and place of their choosing using strategies that they deem most effective for achieving a policy outcome. Indigenous groups employ diverse tactics, like lobbying, contributing to candidates, and mobilizing supporters to influence policy and political processes. Importantly, tribal governments can use interest group strategies to overcome some of the limits of descriptive representation. These collective strategies speak to the ongoing and everchanging encounters that shape power relationships between tribal and settler-colonial governments.

While survivance and encounters are important theoretical frameworks for contextualizing Indigenous politics and power relations among tribal governments, individual Natives, Indigenous organizations and settler-colonial governments, they also require that we engage with ideas about where Indigenous groups are situated in society and political science. Wilkins and Stark (2018) and Wilkins (1997), clearly differentiate Indigenous politics from that of blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, women and other racial or ethnic groups in the U.S. As they note, Indigenous people are the original inhabitants of their land, whether in the U.S. or elsewhere. Their pre-existing status as governments and exercise of some form of political power over their territories and people confers different standing than that of other groups. As several scholars note in this issue, Indigenous groups navigate settler-colonial governments in Japan (Komai, 2022), Canada (Beauvais, 2022), and in the United States at both the federal level (Carlson, 2022) and in individual states, including ND (Barreto *et al.*, 2022), and HI (Phan and Lee, 2022), with a status unlike that of racial or ethnic minorities. Some researchers use comparison to groups that are also non-majoritarian but not Indigenous, to highlight the political relationships of out groups (Carlson, 2022; Foxworth and Boulding 2022; Koch, 2022; Barreto *et al.*, 2022). Ultimately both approaches highlight the effectiveness of survivance and encounters for understanding Indigenous politics.

Indigenous politics as political science

Recent scholarship, including the research presented in this special issue, shows that overlooking Indigenous politics obscures important insights and contributions to the study of political science more generally. And while Indigenous politics serves as a microcosm for studying many of the main themes and areas of political science, rather than fitting neatly into one subfield, methodology or paradigm, Indigenous politics pushes scholars to think beyond current approaches and transcend existing categories and methods. As Wilkins and Stark (2018) show so well, Indigenous politics must be considered in and across multiple levels of government, whether nationally or internationally.

The study of Indigenous peoples also challenges traditional conceptions of racial and ethnic politics. Indigenous peoples, like other marginalized groups, suffer from a legacy of discrimination. Yet unlike these other groups, the erasure and dispossession of Indigenous peoples has often been central to the nation-building of settler colonialist and other states. Furthermore, unlike other racial and ethnic groups, Indigenous peoples seek recognition of their status as sovereign governments instead of assimilation or equality within an existing state (Deloria and Lytle, 1984; Kymlicka, 1995). As sovereign governments sharing territories with other governments, Indigenous peoples provide new insights into political participation, intergovernmental relations and the quest for power in the encounters they pursue.

The articles in this issue expand our broader knowledge of political science by representing and crossing subfields, including intergovernmental relations (Carlson, Komai), political participation (Walker, Carlson, Koch), comparative politics (Carlson, Koch, Walker), racial politics (Beauvais, Komai) and public opinion (Foxworth). Many also transcend subfields and reveal how interconnected they are. For example, Komai highlights how Ainu leveraged indigenous politics at the international level to influence domestic politics in Japan. Similarly, Carlson speaks to political participation, intergovernmental relations, and institutionalism in her research on lobbying of Congress by tribal governments.

The methodologically diverse articles in this special issue show how Indigenous politics utilizes the tools for inquiry central to political science research in compelling and insightful ways. Some articles use qualitative methods to tell rich stories of institutional development over time (Komai) while others mix methods to reveal complex intergovernmental relations (Carlson). Still others apply conventional quantitative methods and highlight how Indigenous politics may fit within existing models of political inquiry (Koch). Read together, the articles show how Indigenous politics contributes to, and benefits from the many ways to study politics.

Indigenous politics also facilitates innovative methodological developments. Some articles demonstrate the utility of new measures of public opinion, which show how the politics of the past influence Indigenous politics today (Forworth, Beauvais). Others provide guidance on how to work ethically with diverse communities and develop models of research that respect and collaborate with those communities (Phan and Lee). Importantly, these innovations may prove useful in contexts beyond Indigenous politics.

The articles in this special issue also highlight the great potential of Indigenous politics for the testing and development of theory. Phan and Lee for instance, push

political scientists to decolonize their past and integrate Indigenous peoples and their perspectives into both theory and methodology. Beauvais expands existing theories on racial politics by introducing an innovative new measure for understanding non-Native perspectives on Indigenous issues which incorporates political dynamics specific to them. Other articles demonstrate the utility of testing existing theories by applying them to Indigenous peoples (Carlson, Koch). For example, Carlson investigates the limits of existing theories of the political incorporation of marginalized groups and tests the applicability of interest group theory in her research on tribal government participation in American legislative politics. Her findings suggest that tribal governments are successful in stopping legislation when they choose to engage in the legislative process but that their mechanisms for preventing legislation differ from other marginalized groups. Her research shows how studying Indigenous politics can be used to expand on existing theories about the political participation of marginalized groups to develop more nuanced understandings of political processes. Like Carlson, Koch tests existing theories by examining how prevailing models of political engagement apply to Native participation. He finds that Natives have levels of political knowledge and voter registration similar to Hispanics but lower than that of Caucasians.

The articles also demonstrate how studies of Indigenous politics provide political scientists with a more complete and nuanced picture of participation and representation in mainstream politics (Carlson, Baretto *et al.*, Koch, Komai). For example, Baretto *et al.*, show how Indigenous peoples face restrictions to ballot access and reveal how those restrictions may vary by group and context. They also show how states use a variety of different mechanisms to limit political access and participation by minority groups. Similarly, Komai examines the efforts to assimilate Indigenous Ainu who have utilized multiple strategies to seek representation within hostile institutions. Like Komai, Carlson investigates how tribal governments pursue a range of strategies both similar to and distinct from other marginalized groups. Read together, these works demonstrate how studying Indigenous peoples and the politics surrounding them leads to new insights about participation and representation within democratic states.

Conclusion

While the articles in this special issue illustrate the tremendous breadth of Indigenous politics, they also demonstrate the potential for Indigenous research to add to our understanding of politics and political science more generally. This contributes to existing research, where political scientists have produced innovative scholarship on Indigenous politics, the politics within Indigenous governmental systems and the role of Indigenous governments in intergovernmental relations, both domestically and in different state contexts. Similarly, Indigenous research expands our understanding of international relations and how Indigenous governments have exercised agency in international organizations including the United Nations (Lightfoot, 2016).

Like other scholars of Native politics in the U.S., and Indigenous groups around the world, we have witnessed this growth. Moving forward, there is a tremendous opportunity to expand our knowledge of Indigenous politics, and politics more generally, by continuing to expand research in this important area. This expansion may benefit from a few opportunities that we hope scholars will undertake or continue to

explore. First, we suggest additional collaboration between those working in Indigenous scholarship and those with research questions that would benefit from their experience. As noted in numerous articles in this issue, collaboration is an effective strategy that can utilize the experience of Indigenous scholars. These collaborations will not only draw on the growing body of literature but facilitate connections that expand the contributions that Indigenous politics is already making to political science more generally. Second, journal editors should seek and advocate for additional research that incorporates Indigenous politics into their area of specialization. While political science may have historically reflected some “academics who have let their expectations get in the way of actual observations” and not done justice to Indigenous politics, there are opportunities for meaningful contributions across sub-fields and approaches within the discipline as the research in this issue demonstrate.

As the body of literature that includes Indigenous peoples or politics grows, we look forward to seeing additional funding for Indigenous centered research, as well as consideration of projects that incorporate Indigenous politics in research grant applications. As Carlson (2022), Phan and Lee (2022) and Foxworth and Boulding (2022) show, the output of funded research is important to our understanding of Indigenous politics. Examples of high quality externally funded research is already underway at the Native Nations Institute at the University of AZ, at the National Congress of American Indians and the Reclaiming Native Truths Project (Foxworth and Boulding, 2022) among others.

Finally, Indigenous politics and Indigenous research should be included in textbooks, graduate and undergraduate courses on power, public policy, intergovernmental relations, comparative politics, American politics, political theory, and law. Students should be encouraged to consider the importance of Indigenous politics when discussing political science. Specific courses that address Indigenous politics at the undergraduate and graduate level should be developed to supplement and expand on the existing curriculum.

This special issue on Indigenous politics has sought to serve as a starting point for further exploration of a developing area of political science. As the research presented here demonstrates, past, present, and future Indigenous research has an important place in our understanding of politics and political science.

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