

RESEARCH ARTICLE / ÉTUDE ORIGINALE

Is Indigeneity like Ethnicity? Theorizing and Assessing Models of Indigenous Political Representation

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Abstract

Within the broader literature on political representation, studies exploring Indigenous forms of representation are rather limited. Where they exist, they tend to explore how Western models of political representation include Indigenous peoples, conflating Indigenous groups with ethnic minorities. This article asks whether and how Indigenous political representation might be distinguished from the representation of ethnic minorities. Our argument is that Indigenous groups' identities tend to be based on different claims and relationships to the state than ethnic groups, which leads to political mobilization seeking a means to respond to the colonial nation-state project. We develop a theoretical framework that identifies three principles that ought to inform an effective and legitimate model of Indigenous political representation: recognition, protection and decolonization. We then apply this theoretical framework to assess the extent to which existing models of Indigenous representation in Bolivia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway correspond with these three principles.

Résumé

Dans la bibliographie sur la représentation politique, les études explorant les formes autochtones de représentation sont plutôt limitées. Lorsqu'elles existent, elles ont tendance à déterminer la manière dont les modèles occidentaux de représentation politique incluent les peuples autochtones, les associant aux minorités ethniques. Cet article demande s'il conviendrait de distinguer la représentation politique autochtone de celle des minorités ethniques et dans quelle mesure. Notre argument est que les identités des groupes autochtones ont tendance à être fondées sur des revendications et des relations avec l'État différentes de celles des groupes ethniques, ce qui mène à une mobilisation politique recherchant le moyen de répondre au projet colonial nation-État. Nous élaborons un cadre théorique qui définit trois principes susceptibles de guider un modèle efficace et légitime de représentation politique autochtone : la reconnaissance, la protection et la décolonisation. Nous appliquons ensuite ce cadre théorique pour évaluer dans quelle mesure les modèles existants de représentation autochtone en Bolivie, au Canada, en Nouvelle-Zélande et en Norvège correspondent à ces trois principes.

Keywords: Political representation; Indigenous peoples; comparative politics; ethnic groups

Positionality Statement

As non-Indigenous scholars, we are keenly aware of the limitations we encounter when carrying out work that engages with the heterogeneous political identities, perspectives and objectives of Indigenous peoples. In line with this view, we actively seek to avoid the objectification of Indigenous peoples and their lived realities and to avoid prescribing solutions to challenges that we cannot fully understand. Our objective in this article is thus to reflect upon and open up space within a larger body of literature for the perspectives and needs of Indigenous peoples as expressed by themselves and to account for, wherever possible, the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous peoples in a variety of contexts.

Introduction

Representation is a critical component of effective and legitimate political institutions. The central challenge in achieving representative institutions is to find mechanisms that can reflect the diverse needs, interests and views of different groups within a political community. While there are many such groups, this article focuses on Indigenous peoples.

There is a well-established theoretical and empirical literature on political representation, though consideration of Indigenous voices and identity within this body of work is relatively circumspect. The central focus of the literature is the importance of “presence” within political institutions to achieve descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967). The groups most often seen as lacking presence, and thus requiring institutional mechanisms that facilitate their inclusion in the political process through electoral designs, are women and ethnic minorities (Mansbridge, 1999). Following Mala Htun (2004), one of the foundational logics of this work is that institutional mechanisms for representing gender and ethnicity rightly differ: gender is framed as an identity that cuts across partisan divides, and so quotas for female candidates are typically seen as the means to facilitate the election of women, whereas ethnicity is framed as coinciding with political cleavages, and thus reserved seats in legislatures for ethnic groups and parties are seen as the means most likely to facilitate their inclusion in politics. To the extent that Indigeneity is considered in this body of work, the tendency is to explore the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in Western models of political representation, equating them with other ethnic groups and viewing them as similar to migrants, racialized groups or national minorities (Htun, 2004; Krook and O’Brien, 2010; Lublin and Wright, 2013; Bird, 2014; Kroeber, 2017).

This tendency raises important questions: Is Indigeneity like ethnicity? Does Indigenous identity cut across or coincide with political cleavages in the modern nation-state system?

This article takes up these questions and the related conceptual puzzle of representing Indigenous peoples within contemporary democracies, clarifying the extent to which Indigenous and ethnic identities differ. Its goals are to outline how theories of representation ought to account for the identity and interests of Indigenous

peoples separate from ethnic minorities and to assess the extent to which existing models of institutional design can account for these differences in practice. The core argument is that Indigeneity is distinct from ethnicity, defined by unique representational needs that stem from Indigenous peoples' relation to the colonial nation-state project. This relational aspect of Indigeneity complicates the means and goals of political representation, requiring arrangements and institutions that are designed to both respond to and rectify a colonial past, rather than ones designed to establish mechanisms facilitating inclusion in the state infrastructure or ones that re-create imposed forms of political autonomy. To help guide the development of such institutional mechanisms, we seek out the key principles that ought to inform an effective and legitimate theory of Indigenous representation. Taking into account the unique components of Indigenous identity and the political objectives voiced by Indigenous groups through their mobilization and scholarship, we find that three principles underpin most understandings of Indigenous representation: recognition, protection and decolonization. When assessing actual models of Indigenous representation against these three principles, it becomes clear that existing approaches largely fall short of these ideals; often, these models are flawed precisely because they conflate Indigenous groups with other ethnic minorities.

Our argument builds upon a particularly strong tradition of work on Indigenous and minority national political representation in Canada. This scholarship has identified Indigenous groups as distinct from other national minority groups, pointing both to the particular challenges Indigenous groups face in colonial state infrastructure (Papillon, 2012; Sabin, 2014) and to the multitude of avenues by which Indigenous peoples might exercise their autonomy within the state (Abele and Prince, 2006; Ladner, 2005). Historically, however, the focus of this literature has been on self-government (Henderson, 1994; 2002; Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996) rather than considering institutions of shared rule, as we do in this article. The work that grapples with the complexity of Indigenous political representation in the Canadian context—and its implications for the theory of political representation—has not been sufficiently integrated into the broader comparative politics literature. We seek to build on these insights to advance thinking about institutions of shared rule in Canada and more broadly.

The article proceeds in four parts. We start by discussing representative theory and by distinguishing between ethnicity and Indigeneity. Next we identify the principles distilled from Indigenous mobilization and scholarship that ought to inform Indigenous representative mechanisms. We then apply these principles to assess existing models of Indigenous representation in four countries (Bolivia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway). Assessing this cross-section of institutional models against the three principles shows their limitations (and promise). We conclude by discussing how our analysis can help us move past the view that political representation for Indigenous peoples is “good” and toward an understanding of what “good representation” should look like.

Untangling Threads: Theorizing Ethnic and Indigenous Representation

Three elements of the contemporary literature on ethnic representation are critical to consider when theorizing models of Indigenous representation, particularly

when developing a framework of Indigenous political representation that stands in contrast to theories of ethnic representation.

The first element is the foundational role that presence plays in the theory of political representation for minority groups. Presence in political institutions is seen as the necessary condition to achieve descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967). For ethnic minorities, there are two sets of mechanisms most often promoted to include group delegates or trustees within the state: electoral mechanisms (such as reserved seats, constituency designs, or lower thresholds for ethnic candidates and parties; Htun, 2004; Bird, 2014) and territorial autonomy (Htun, 2016).

The second element is a recent strand of theory that focuses on the relational nature of representation and the act of making a claim for special status and representation. From this position, representation is seen as a dynamic two-way process whereby constituents choose representatives and representatives choose constituents through claims to a connection (Saward, 2006: 301–2). This conception of representation is based on an explicit link between recognition and representation: it is the recognition or rejection of claims that are seen to shape the dynamics and legitimacy of a representative relationship and mechanisms (Rehfeld, 2006).

The third element is a focus on the value of including minorities within state institutions. Central to this work is accounting for the outcomes of representative mechanisms. This work highlights the effect of minority inclusion on decision making (Swain, 1993; Turgeon and Gagnon, 2013; Schertzer, 2016), the empowerment of the groups themselves and the overall increase in political legitimacy (Banducci et al., 2004).

These developments in the theory and study of ethnic representation raise a number of problems—and potentially fruitful avenues—when applied to Indigenous representation. The problems of applying theories of ethnic representation to Indigenous peoples largely stem from incorrectly conflating two different forms of identity.

Broadly, ethnicity is an ascriptive category derived from symbols and boundary markers between groups of people (Barth, 1969). More precisely, ethnic groups are a form of identity on a conceptual continuum with nations (Smith, 1998: 181). The widely accepted definition of ethnic groups reinforces this continuum: they are named groups that loosely share a set of characteristics (history, ancestry, culture) and a home territory, but their sense of identity, political institutions and public culture is not as developed as nations (Smith, 2009: 27). Ethnic minorities are generally understood through one of two lenses: 1) as minorities by will—groups that mobilize for independence from other groups within a state (for example, Québécois); or 2) as minorities by force—groups that seek a measure of inclusion within the national community but are denied access due to their ethnic heritage (for example, migrants) (Laponce, 1960). In short, ethnic minorities are inherently tied to the nation-state enterprise, as either “proto-nations” seeking their own state or as groups that want to better integrate into the national community in some respect.

By contrast, Indigeneity as an identity largely stems from social and political movements of indigenism, in which specific groups of peoples assert their political

identities as the original inhabitants of particular tracts of land. This claim to aboriginality (to initial and ongoing habitation), combined with the significance of particular tracts of territory to these peoples' spiritualities, is the anthropological foundation of Indigenous identity. These ideas anchor Indigenous identity as a heterogeneous yet definitive category of identity and are strengthened by the kind of global recognition of distinctiveness found in documents such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Following Knight (2001), we contend that as groups that have faced explicit systemic discrimination due to their Indigeneity, Indigenous peoples have legitimate claims to political representation on that very basis.

Contemporary Indigenous identity can be further distinguished from ethnic identity by a specific relationship with the nation-state: Indigenous identities are held not only as individuals or even as groups of individuals but as a relation of difference with others and the colonial state (Weaver, 2001). Taiaiake Alfred has captured this position well: "It has been said that being born Indian is being born into politics. I believe this to be true; because being born a Mohawk of Kahnawake, I do not remember a time free from the impact of political conflict" (Alfred, 1995: 1, quoted in Ladner and McCrossan, 2007: 9). Indigenous identity is, at least in part, a political identity held as a response to the legacy of relations between a people and a settler colonial state. Thus, in addition to being defined through a process of self-identification of Indigeneity and the communal confirmation of that identity by those who share the same self-identification, Indigenous peoples are also defined by their relations with states, governments and non-Indigenous national communities (Weaver, 2001; Bowen, 2007; Maddison, 2013).

Conflating ethnic and Indigenous political identity causes a significant complication for a theory of Indigenous representation: it problematizes the concept of presence. For ethnic groups seeking their own state or inclusion in the state, presence within existing political institutions is a viable avenue to achieve legitimate and effective governance. For Indigenous peoples, inclusion in existing institutions can be at odds with the group's political anchor. Promoting measures that are applicable to ethnic groups, such as additional seats in national parliaments, devolution of existing government powers or integration into existing political parties, can perpetuate a colonial relationship. Special Indigenous electoral districts—or reserved seats in the national legislature—are the central mechanism promoted in this vein (Ladner and McCrossan, 2007; Morden, 2016; Canada, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991; Fleras, 1991; Knight, 2001; Tanguay and Bittle, 2005; Evans and Hill, 2012; Medeiros and Frost, 2014). While many of those promoting these mechanisms do so considering the complex colonial histories and the past injustices of assimilative policies (Morden, 2016; Murphy, 2008), there are also more strong-form critiques of these mechanisms as an extension of the colonial enterprise (Schouls, 1996; Maddison, 2010; Williams, 2016). In short, these critiques help us see that the main approaches promoting presence, which are central to the theory of ethnic representation, fail to account for the unique identities, distinct claims and specific needs of Indigenous peoples.

The debate over specific mechanisms promoting Indigenous presence in state institutions mirrors a foundational debate over the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the colonial state enterprise. There is a significant scholarly

debate on this relationship in the Canadian context, between those stressing the irreconcilability of Indigenous sovereignty within the colonial state enterprise (Alfred, 2008; Coulthard, 2014) and those stressing that reconciliation can be achieved through increased participation in the state (Borrows, 2000; Cairns, 2001). This divide and the related reflection on Indigenous identity bring the problem of presence as a basis for a theory of Indigenous political representation into sharp relief: Indigenous voices and mobilization make clear that presence alone cannot serve as the sufficient condition for an effective and legitimate model of political representation. We cannot rely upon this core principle of ethnic representation to theorize and assess models of Indigenous representation. At the same time, the other two aspects of recent representative theory—the relational and claim-based understanding of representation and the focus on its value for the minority group—can be adapted to build a theory that at least partially addresses aspects of these problems.

Recognition, Protection and Decolonization: Principles of Indigenous Representation

In this section we seek a correction to the approach of applying principles of ethnic representation to inform and assess models of Indigenous political representation. Turning away from a reliance on presence, we sketch alternative principles that can inform a more justifiable basis for developing and assessing models of Indigenous representation. These principles are drawn from the mobilization of Indigenous peoples and the voices of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars reflecting on the Indigenous–settler state relationship. Two lines of thought within this mobilization and literature are particularly central to our theory: 1) simple descriptive representation in state-level institutions does not necessarily provide substantive representation of Indigenous views, nor has it tended to produce sufficient policy outcomes for the attainment of Indigenous political objectives (Fleras, 1985; Maddison, 2010); and 2) the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in settler states can re-create unequal power structures, impose political orders and amount to an assimilation into, or acceptance of, the colonial infrastructure (Alfred, 2005; Murphy, 2008; Irlbacher-Fox, 2009; Coulthard, 2014; Nadasdy, 2017).

Given these foundations, we identify three principles unique to Indigenous groups seeking models of political representation: recognition, protection and decolonization. These three principles are informed by the critical literature on Indigeneity, which has sought to grapple with the need for autonomous Indigenous peoples to interact with and represent themselves to colonial settler states. What differentiates these principles from other groups' norms with regard to political representation is their opposition to existing state infrastructures and the push for principles that challenge the colonial narrative and respect the autonomy of Indigenous peoples (Alfred, 2008; Coulthard, 2014; Nadasdy, 2017). Consequently, the three principles that we argue underpin most conceptions of Indigenous political representation seek to respond to the limitations of the goal of presence, while also serving as useful tools to assess models aimed at representing Indigeneity in and to settler states.

Recognition

While the politics of recognition has been central to the claims of ethnic minorities for special representative mechanisms, its application to Indigenous peoples is controversial and contested. The conceptual ties to liberalism can frame the core tenets of the politics of recognition—such as presence and inclusion in political institutions—as extensions of the colonial project (Coulthard, 2014; Alfred, 2005). Basing a model of political representation upon recognition can re-create significant power imbalances between Indigenous groups and the colonial state. Centring the colonial state as the key agent of recognition exacerbates the fundamental power imbalances in an Indigenous–settler relationship, reinforcing paradigms of social suffering and delegitimizing Indigenous sovereignty as autonomous from its recognition by the colonial state (Coulthard, 2014; Irlbacher-Fox, 2009).

However, the claim for recognition can be reframed to decentre the state. The fact of Indigenous peoples' sovereignty prior to colonization and the use of this fact as justification for a specifically Indigenous claim to self-determination are what set their claim apart from other claims for representation. The claim to self-determination often rests on the premise of “lost sovereignty” and the missed opportunity of recognizing Indigenous statehood resulting from discriminatory colonial architecture (Charters, 2010: 229). Consequently, the recognition of not only the legitimacy but also the distinctiveness of the Indigenous claim to self-determination is a crucial principle for Indigenous peoples seeking political representation. Such recognition has typically been denied or resisted by the governments of settler states, which fear that acknowledgment of a sovereign Indigenous people could challenge the legitimacy of state power or lead to secession (Charters, 2010). However, Indigenous claims for recognition of their inherent sovereignty are rarely an outright rejection of all facets of state authority and almost never express a desire for secession. Rather, the recognition that Indigenous peoples demand is a rejection of status quo intergovernmental relations based on unilateralism, domination and exclusion (Murphy, 2004).

While its form varies across cases, recognition, at a foundational level, is grounded by the need for inclusion without imposition and for participation without subjugation. Unlike ethnic minorities, whose political representation is aimed at increasing the legitimacy, efficacy and trust of existing state structures or the broader nation-state enterprise, Indigenous peoples' objectives for political representation are typically to reacquire Indigenous control over Indigenous affairs and to establish an egalitarian relationship with non-Indigenous states and peoples (Borrows, 2000). Indigenous autonomy presupposes not only an element of self-government but also extensive relations with other existing state institutions and peoples both within and outside of Indigenous territories (Broderstad, 2011). The claim to Indigenous self-determination is not usually one of further Indigenous alienation; instead, it is a claim that implies a focus on “shared destiny and reciprocal dependency” (Broderstad, 2011: 898). The principle of recognition can thus be reframed as one of sharedness and of mutuality, rather than a simple extension to participate in existing state power structures. Where Indigenous groups seek political representation, the principle of recognition grounds their

representation as an enactment of self-determination and an application of shared sovereignty.

Protection

Alongside the demand for processes of recognition are requests for specific guarantees of protection. In the context of Indigeneity, this is not a claim for paternalistic protection by the state; rather, it is a principle of political representation that empowers Indigenous peoples to protect themselves against further encroachments by the state. Separation from, rather than inclusion in, state institutions is particularly stressed by Indigenous peoples, for whom these institutions embody colonial attitudes and practices. Thus, the principle of protection is closely related to, and predicated on, state acceptance of the principle of recognition. Indigenous groups seek a principle of recognition that secures mutuality and consent of their right to self-determination symbolically, as well as a principle of protection that secures this right by way of substantial, enforceable and binding guarantees (Murphy, 2004). For many Indigenous groups, the embedding of these guarantees into settler state constitutions fosters their sense of protection, granting them leverage in both domestic and international spheres (Broderstad, 2011). Constitutional recognition of Indigenous identities, rights and sovereignties provides one means by which these peoples can seek protection and redress by invoking the very institutions of the colonial settler state (Dubois and Saunders, 2013).

However, it does not follow that Indigenous peoples necessarily seek institutions of political representation *within* existing state structures. A corollary of the principle of protection is that it ensures that Indigenous peoples have the right to choose by and for themselves the means by which they interact with the colonial settler state. Their institutions of political representation must be self-determining, and the existing institutions of the settler state need not be employed by Indigenous peoples where they reject them. This autonomy to decide the level of interaction reflects the fact that institutions of political representation in settler states have a tendency to perpetuate the dominant culture by maintaining norms and practices as “universal” (and consequently erasing the ways in which they are underpinned by specific cultural norms and values). Indigenous peoples can see these institutions as fundamentally hostile to their cultural and political identities (Maddison, 2010). They may opt instead for mechanisms and bodies that are more culturally hospitable and politically influential, deciding for themselves the nature of the representative relationship between their group(s) and the state. A theory of Indigenous representation needs to be built on the principle that Indigenous groups have a right to choose for themselves the nature of their relationship with the settler state. This right must be not only respected but guaranteed through clear mechanisms, in order to ensure the effectiveness of their political representation.

Decolonization

The processes and outcomes of colonization are uniquely felt by Indigenous peoples. Colonization has historically functioned by stripping the Indigenous peoples

of a given territory of their political autonomy and subsequently establishing central “state” institutions of a new, often exclusionary, order. The elevation and accentuation of Indigenous sovereignty in relations with the state is one crucial way in which the settler colonial features of the imposed state can be deconstructed. Decolonization as both a practice and theory holds that structures of Indigenous representation that simply build into or out of existing state infrastructure are likely insufficient and ultimately hostile to the enterprise. This is because settler colonial states and the non-Indigenous groups that control them have historically oscillated between policies of exclusion from and co-optation into the existing political system, with the goal of undermining inclusivity (Bowen, 2007). This has led to a legacy of apprehension and suspicion toward state-initiated and state-oriented political institutions, particularly legislative institutions, which for Indigenous groups now carry the stigma of prior disenfranchisement and assimilation (Murphy, 2008).

For Indigenous peoples, participation in settler colonial state institutions often presents a paradox: it is an opportunity to make progress on policy or political issues of importance for Indigenous peoples, but it can also be an act of acknowledging the legitimacy of settler state authorities. Such acknowledgment of state authority is at odds with the objectives of decolonization.

To help address this paradox, following Tuck and Yang (2012), we conceive of the principle of decolonization as one that centres Indigenous sovereignty and futurity—a position that calls into question the commensurability of institutional arrangements imposed unilaterally by the settler state with the overall project of decolonization. We understand the principle of decolonization as the core objective that runs through and relies upon our two other principles. Recognizing and enacting Indigenous sovereignty, while protecting that sovereignty through the inclusion and participation of Indigenous peoples on their own terms, furthers the broader project of decolonization. At the same time, a commitment to the principles of recognition and protection that avoids imposing unequal power structures requires a recentring of Indigenous sovereignty through a commitment to the act of decolonization. Only when all three principles are implemented in tandem is it possible to envision the political representation of Indigenous peoples in institutions of their own making, co-sovereign with settler state institutions of political representation and protected by the constitutions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike.

Assessing Contemporary Models of Indigenous Representation

In this section we apply the principles that we argue ought to inform a theory of Indigenous political representation to briefly assess existing models and mechanisms of representation. The application of our framework to real-world designs serves two purposes. First, it grounds our theoretical reflection, providing an indication of how existing approaches to facilitating Indigenous representation can follow—or fall short of—these principles in practice. Second, it demonstrates the potential utility of our theory as an analytical framework. Applying our framework to a set of cases allows us to assess the limitations and potential of particular institutional designs. It is by applying our theoretical reflections to real-world examples that we clearly see how Indigenous demands for representation complicate the nation-state project and thus require different mechanisms than those that may be justifiable for migrants or national minority groups.

We consider mechanisms of Indigenous representation in four settler states: Bolivia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway. These cases provide broad geographic coverage across the globe and reflect different contexts in terms of Indigenous–settler relationships. Each country has also been a foundational case in the literature on ethnic representation, informing the development of the theory and empirical study of representative dynamics. Consequently, they are important cases for assessing the conflation of Indigeneity with ethnicity. Together, these countries also provide a cross-section of the main institutional models currently used to facilitate Indigenous representation. They thus provide a useful subset to (1) consider the potential differences between institutional models of representing ethnic groups and Indigenous groups and (2) assess how the models stack up against the principles that we argue ought to underpin an autonomous theory of Indigenous representation.

Bolivia

Approximately 6.2 million people identify as belonging to one of 36 recognized Indigenous groups, constituting over 60 per cent of the Bolivian population. Despite their numerical majority, Spanish colonialism and a history of marginalization have pushed Indigenous peoples into a political minority situation (Bird, 2014). Nevertheless, new opportunities for Indigenous peoples to achieve greater political influence have followed redemocratization in Bolivia.

Two pillars define Indigenous representation in Bolivia: the first is the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) and the leadership of Evo Morales; the second is the institutionalization of reserved seats for Indigenous peoples. The electoral success of Morales and his MAS party, which is historically linked to Indigenous social movements, has sharply increased the numbers of Indigenous individuals in the national legislature, from just 3 per cent in 1989–1993 to 25 per cent in 2009 (Madrid and Rhodes-Purdy, 2016: 895). In 2015, however, the Indigenous population comprised 41 per cent of the population but only 25 per cent of Congress seats (The Global Americans, 2017). A new constitution, passed in 2009 under the leadership of Morales and the MAS, incorporated several measures geared at the representation of Indigenous peoples in Bolivia. It recognized the rights of Indigenous peoples to autonomy according to their own customs and norms, while reserving seven seats in the national legislature for Indigenous peoples (Tockman et al., 2015). Indigenous organizations had originally demanded 34 reserved seats—one for almost every recognized Indigenous group in Bolivia. In response, the MAS-led government proposed 15 seats (intended as a compromise between the Indigenous demands and the actual demographic weight of the groups); however, the opposition party negotiated this down further, resulting in the seven seats, each accorded to a separate Indigenous electoral district (Htun and Ossa, 2013; Bird, 2014). Any individual in Bolivia can opt to vote on the Indigenous or the general electoral roll, but they cannot vote on both.

Indigenous mobilization pushing for recognition of their status—as part of the broader move toward democracy in Bolivia over the past two decades—has largely been successful. In addition to recognizing 36 different Indigenous groups in the country and granting many of these groups’ languages some official status in the state, the

Bolivian government ratified the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in November of 2007. A number of institutional mechanisms representing Indigenous peoples have followed these recognitions, including the seven reserved seats for Indigenous peoples in the national legislature. However, despite recognition of the right of Indigenous peoples to autonomy, particularly over their traditional territories, the Bolivian constitution sets clear limits on that recognition: the autonomy of Indigenous peoples does not supersede the preservation of the unitary state (Tockman et al., 2015). Although there are a few cases of Indigenous self-government within Bolivia, these self-governing units are generally seen as devolved from the unitary state. Indigenous autonomy is understood less as an expression of the right to self-determination and more as a model of decentralized governance within the existing system (Tockman et al., 2015).

Lacking strong institutional mechanisms for guaranteeing the self-determining rights of Indigenous peoples, many of the current features of Bolivian Indigenous representation are a result of political negotiation and compromise. For example, the seven seats that are presented as reserved for Indigenous peoples are open for any party or group to nominate candidates and can be voted on by any Bolivian who chooses to self-enrol for representation by these seats. Weak protective mechanisms simultaneously feed into a lack of consideration for the decolonization of the Bolivian political architecture. Assessments of the success of Morales and the MAS with regard to the substantive representation of Indigenous interests at the state level are mixed (Bowen, 2007; Htun and Ossa, 2013). The fact that Indigenous groups themselves challenge the mechanisms instituted to date, as well as criticize the ways in which the MAS purports to represent their interests, suggests that seeking descriptive representation through settler state institutions is insufficient for meeting the decolonizing objectives of Bolivian Indigenous peoples.

Canada

There are approximately 1.7 million Indigenous people across Canada (4.9% of the total population) in three broad groups: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Of these, First Nations constitute the largest group, with over 600 distinct communities.

State–Indigenous relations have been defined by a series of processes and institutional mechanisms that sought to expand state power. Early mechanisms of expansion include the “pre-confederation” treaties between Indigenous peoples and the British Crown, as well as the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which claimed British sovereign authority over the territory and purported to recognize Indigenous title over lands that could only be ceded through treaty negotiations. The British North America Act in 1867 shifted relations, placing “Indians and lands reserved for Indians” under the jurisdiction of the federal government. The Indian Act (passed in 1876 and still in place today) created a registry, reservation system and “band councils” (local governance regimes). In the mid-twentieth century, the government shifted again toward a more individualist approach to state–Indigenous relations, exemplified by the 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy that promoted the assimilation of Indigenous peoples. Significant mobilization against this proposal ushered in the modern treaty period. This approach was further

reinforced through two provisions in the Constitution Act, 1982: section 35, which recognizes and affirms existing Indigenous and treaty rights; and section 25, which requires the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to respect Indigenous rights.

Contemporary Indigenous–state relations in Canada are largely shaped by modern treaty making. These treaties are comprehensive agreements negotiated directly with Indigenous communities relating to land title, development and self-government. They solidify mechanisms of autonomy and facilitate pathways to self-rule, largely through self-governing agreements (Abele and Prince, 2006; Irlbacher-Fox, 2009; Alcantara and Whitfield 2010). Over 20 self-governing agreements have been signed, with approximately 90 ongoing negotiations (Eyford, 2015: 7).

The institutional and ideational legacies of these different phases of state–Indigenous relations have shaped the lack of specific mechanisms facilitating Indigenous political representation. At the federal level, there are no special mechanisms that facilitate the direct inclusion of Indigenous representatives. The now-symbolic nature of the queen and regnal representatives, such as the governor general, has left state–Indigenous relations primarily in the hands of the federal bureaucracy, which has long had a department (now two) dedicated to administering the Indian Act. Provincial institutions similarly have no special representative mechanisms (though in 1992, Nova Scotia created one reserved seat in its legislature for a Mi'kmaq representative, which the group has declined to fill for the past 25 years). Indigenous peoples instead largely employ umbrella and regional organizations (for example, the Assembly of First Nations, Métis Nation of Canada and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami) to advocate on their behalf.

These mechanisms of Indigenous representation reflect a number of contradictory principles. The pre-confederation treaties, particularly the Royal Proclamation and Treaty of Niagara (1764), are often lauded as treating Indigenous groups as co-equals with the Crown, recognizing and protecting their claims to title and sovereignty. Subsequent mechanisms were increasingly imposed and exclusionary: the Indian Act and historical treaty making treated Indigenous people as wards of the state, dispossessed them of their land and erased their legal sovereignty. Even the provisions of the Constitution Act, 1982 intended to “protect” Indigenous peoples are attempts at reconciling the existing legal architecture with Indigenous rights, rather than a clear recognition and protection of Indigenous sovereignty. However, over time, a number of mechanisms have emerged that allow for Indigenous participation in the political process, facilitating inclusion without complete imposition. The negotiation of self-governing agreements and comprehensive land claims agreements have become the main avenue for this recognition, creating political space for Indigenous models of governance and representation. In many of these agreements, particularly in the far north, mechanisms of shared governance are established between Indigenous and settler communities (Davidson, 2018).

This mixed assessment of Canada's approach to Indigenous representation in terms of the recognition and protection of Indigenous claims reflects the uneven process of decolonization. The process of dismantling the imposed and colonial architecture of the Canadian state has been slow—as the continued reliance on the Indian Act and the reservation system attest. Despite some progress, these institutional legacies have created significant barriers to facilitating Indigenous political

representation, particularly in terms of shared political spaces rather than solely through autonomy and self-rule.

New Zealand

There are approximately 600,000 Māori people in New Zealand, constituting nearly 15 per cent of the population. While today there is an established pan-Māori identity, pre-contact and early contact identities were divided along territorial and clan lines.

There are three institutional pillars underpinning the relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples in New Zealand. The first is the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, which has three articles. Article 1 asserts the sovereignty of the British Crown. Article 2 recognizes Māori rights to control collective and individual land titles. Article 3 extends the protection and rights of British subjects to the Māori. There are, however, critical differences between the English and Māori versions: in Article 1, the English version uses “sovereignty,” while the Māori translation uses “kāwanatanga” (governorship); and in Article 2 of the Māori version, the concept of continued “tino rangatiratanga” (chieftainship or self-determination) over territory is used, while it is absent from the English version (Hill, 2004). The second pillar is the 1867 Māori Representation Act, which created four reserved electoral seats in Parliament for Māori with blood ties (requiring 50 per cent ancestry to run or vote). The seats overlaid the existing electoral districts, were designed with little relation to the actual distribution of Māori communities and were significantly under-representative relative to the population (with estimates that a more representative number ranged from 14 to 20 seats) (Murphy, 2008: 190–91). The third pillar is the shifting nature of direct Māori government, which has incorporated a range of mechanisms: these include a short-lived (1892 to 1902) parallel Māori Parliament (Kotahitanga); the government’s response of establishing Māori councils in 1900, which were largely flawed local governance mechanisms; and reformed councils dating from the mid-twentieth century, which provided a measure of local control, with a national umbrella Māori Council to facilitate state-Indigenous consultation (Hill, 2004).

The current institutional mechanisms that facilitate Indigenous representation in New Zealand build on these pillars. The most significant is the system of reserved seats for the Māori. In 1975, the blood requirement for the seats was changed, and in 1996, the shift to a mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral system led to an increase in the number of reserved seats to reflect population levels and a tendency to include Māori candidates higher on party lists for the general rolls. The result is an upward trend in the number of Māori MPs in Parliament—from less than 7 per cent of seats prior to 1996, to 13 per cent that year and 24 per cent in 2017 (Lublin and Wright, 2013). The MMP system has also facilitated the growth of Indigenous political parties, gaining in both seats and influence. Indirect representation of Māori interests finds expression in a special Waitangi Tribunal (roughly half Māori), which has provided advisory opinions on perceived violations of the Treaty since 1975, as well as in the Ministry of Māori Development, which is responsible for government policy on Māori affairs (Schertzer, 2018).

The mechanisms of representation today, and the foundations upon which they rest, provide both opportunities and challenges for the Māori. The contemporary

reserved seat system promotes inclusion in shared decision making without imposing particular understandings of the Indigenous role in state activities—the hallmarks of a defensible approach to Indigenous representation. The system empowers Māori representatives and parties to promote ideas that define and protect the interests of the group, with some success influencing government policy in recent years (Humpage, 2017). However, the foundations of this system are deeply flawed: the reserved seat system was a tool of colonial imposition, aimed at assimilating Māori and dividing their existing power bases (Fleras, 1985). Similarly, although the Treaty of Waitangi, and the special tribunal system established to advise on violations, has increasingly become a mechanism to empower Māori to protect their interests and rights, the treaty rests on shaky foundations: it legitimized a widespread capture of Māori land in the 1860s and the individualization of title away from collective ownership (McHugh, 1991; Kingi, n.d.). Today the legacies of this colonial enterprise remain. While a shift is taking place to find methods of collective ownership and control, the shift is slow and hindered by institutional legacies such as the strictly advisory nature of the Waitangi Tribunal. In short, New Zealand demonstrates how mechanisms that rest on colonial legacies aimed at including Māori within the state-building enterprise can nevertheless recognize and empower the Māori to protect their interests as part of a longer road toward decolonization.

Norway

Inhabiting an ancestral territory known as Sápmi, the Sámi people are an Indigenous people found across Norway, Sweden, Finland and parts of Russia. The Sámi people number approximately 36,000–60,000, with the largest share of the population in Norway.

Following conflict between the Norwegian state and the Sámi people regarding the building of a dam on the Alta River in the 1970s, political pressure led to the first official safeguards of the Sámi and their culture in the 1980s. First, the Sámi Act (1987) legislated several protections of Sámi language, culture and community life, including the establishment of a Sámi parliament. Second, in 1988, the Norwegian constitution was amended to require Norwegian authorities to facilitate the protection of Sámi culture, language and way of life (Semb, 2005; Broderstad, 2011). Little changed for more than 15 years, until the Finnmark Act in 2005 provided for a new resource management regime between the Sámi and the Norwegian state.

The key vehicle for Sámi political representation to the Norwegian state has become the Sámediggi, the Sámi Parliament. The Parliament has 39 representatives, chosen in direct elections from seven constituencies across Norway every four years. It has primarily been advisory in nature, although it has the power to take some policy initiatives and has been granted some authority in areas of particular relevance to the Sámi, such as linguistic and cultural preservation, education, and industry and resource management (Gaski, 2008: 3). Since the 1990s, the Sámediggi has increased its power by moving from a purely advisory body into one that consults and strengthens relations with all levels of government (Broderstad, 2011: 901).

The Parliament has faced numerous challenges and critiques, both from the Sámi as well as non-Indigenous critics. Concerns range from those that suggest “special” measures for the representation of a particular group can increase tensions between groups within Norway, to the more specific concerns of factions within the Sámi population, such as the reindeer herders, that the Parliament will fail to meet the needs of the group or effect substantive change (Semb, 2005: 534–35). While the Sámi Parliament acknowledges the distinctiveness of the Sámi people as a group with legitimate claims to some form of guaranteed representation in the Norwegian state, the fact that the body is merely advisory and is endowed with devolved powers is insufficient for full recognition of the Sámi as a self-determining people. This has not proven to be a complete barrier to its effectiveness in terms of policy making, and the development of the Sámediggi into a more autonomous, authoritative body is certainly possible—although the institution will always rest on a problematic foundation, since its incorporation, infrastructure and implementation are all imposed measures by the Norwegian settler state. The very definition of who constitutes a Sámi has been largely dictated by the state, and Sámi selfhood remains hotly contested (Semb, 2005: 533).

Despite the Sámi’s assertions of sovereignty over their own affairs (Semb, 2005), without stronger state recognition of the Sámi as a sovereign Indigenous people and greater respect for that sovereignty by meeting the claims of the Sámi to choose for and by themselves the mechanisms by which they represent themselves to the state, the Sámediggi will likely continue to be challenged as a truly self-determining body.

Conclusion

Ethnic and Indigenous groups seeking political representation share some characteristics: both are defined in relation to an other, and both are seeking to increase their political power and protect their interests. However, our theoretical and empirical reflections above drive toward a common point: Indigenous representation differs in fundamental ways from ethnic representation. A defensible theory and model of Indigenous representation needs to start from a position that takes these differences into account. Among the most important of these differences is the particular nature of the claim being made. Whereas ethnic groups are largely seeking to join the nation-state enterprise in some manner (either through inclusion or secession), Indigenous peoples are often seeking models of representation that challenge the foundations of the nation-state model as part of a process of decolonization. The legacy of the colonial enterprise has fundamentally shifted the nature of the Indigenous claim to political representation, such that the objective of representation is a means to institutionalize co-sovereignty. Accordingly, while theories of gender representation are largely based on the idea that gender cuts across political cleavages, and theories of ethnic representation hold that ethnicity largely coincides with political cleavages, a theory of Indigenous representation needs to start from the basis that Indigenous groups complicate and challenge existing political cleavages within the nation-state system.

Moving from the position that representation is good for Indigenous peoples toward conceptualizing what good representation entails requires appreciation of this difference between gender, ethnicity and Indigeneity. In particular, conflating

ethnic and Indigenous identities, and promoting representation without an appreciation of the differences between these groups, can lead to questionable mechanisms and models.


We have identified three principles that can act as a foundation for the separation of Indigenous representation from ethnic representation. The principle of recognition rests on the fact of Indigenous pre-colonial sovereignty, tying the legitimacy of the claim to self-determination to its distinctiveness. The principle of protection builds on this foundation of unextinguished sovereignty, seeking mechanisms of mutuality and consent, as well as the security of these measures by way of substantial, enforceable and binding guarantees that empower Indigenous groups. Finally, the principle of decolonization requires that Indigenous peoples choose the degree and manner of their representation to the settler state. The opportunity and ability for Indigenous peoples to deconstruct colonial legacies and institutions, as well as implement mechanisms of their own choosing that both build into and build out of the state, are crucial for the long-term viability of Indigenous representative institutions. There are, of course, additional elements of these principles and other ideas that need to be incorporated to build a theory of Indigenous representation that stands apart from theories of ethnic representation. Most notably, an autonomous theory of Indigenous representation also has to grapple with notions of accountability between governed and governors (Alcantara et al., 2012). The role federal political systems can play as either enablers or constrainers of different pathways to Indigenous representation also begs for additional reflection (Henderson, 1994; 2002; Papillon, 2012; Sabin, 2014; Davidson, 2018). However, here we have sought to focus on three core principles that can act as the foundation for an autonomous theory of Indigenous representation.

Combined, these principles provide more than just the basis of a theory of Indigenous political representation; they can also be used as a set of tools to assess current practice. Our analysis above shows the potential utility of these principles as a framework to understand and evaluate existing models of Indigenous peoples' representation across the globe. Employing the principles in this manner demonstrates not only how Indigenous groups differ from ethnic groups but how their claims and mobilization complicate the existing structures and mechanisms of representation in the nation-state system. Indigenous groups challenge the very logic of the nation-state to a greater extent than the claims and mobilization of ethnic groups.

Our analysis of existing models in the four cases above demonstrates the complexity and contradictions inherent in different models of Indigenous representation. The key takeaway here is that the different pathways and contradictory approaches have been employed with decidedly mixed results. In Bolivia, the reserved seats at least partially recognize the status of Indigenous peoples, but their participation in the political system exists without adequate protections. In Canada, representation has been pursued through negotiated self-governance, which rests on a significantly qualified recognition and protection of Indigenous identity, given the existing colonial legacies. New Zealand epitomizes a contradictory model, with its colonial foundations designed to facilitate assimilation today supporting a measure of recognition and protection as part of a decolonization

process. The Sámediggi in Norway, similarly, has considerable potential to provide recognition and protection for the Sámi but largely falls short, given its nature as an advisory board with its status delegated from the colonial state. The complications and contradictions of these different models—highlighted through an assessment of the principles of recognition, protection and decolonization—help make the case for the need to further develop and employ an autonomous theory of Indigenous representation.

The common theme for the inherent contradictions in these models is colonialism: most mechanisms employed to date rest on shaky colonial foundations, extending representation to Indigenous peoples as part of the colonial enterprise. The incorporation of reserved seats for the Māori in New Zealand is a case in point. However, some mechanisms demonstrate an ability to facilitate Indigenous representation that recognizes, at least to some degree, Indigenous sovereignty (such as the self-governing agreements achieved in Canada and Bolivia) and empowers their ability to protect their interests (as in the case of the Norwegian constitutional amendments and Sámediggi). These elements of the models across the four cases direct our attention to the importance of the principle of decolonization—they indicate that political representation can be understood as a process of decolonization by centring Indigenous sovereignty and futurity in whichever mechanisms are pursued. Interestingly, as our cases demonstrate, there are different pathways to abide by these principles; Indigenous peoples need neither employ nor understand these principles in the same way. The differences between them can be attributed to different contexts of Indigenous–state relations, different legacies of colonialism and the heterogeneity of Indigenous identity itself. However, while there is room for variation among Indigenous peoples with regard to their political representation, we must nevertheless start by disentangling Indigenous peoples from other groups seeking representation.

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Acknowledgments. Robert Schertzer gratefully acknowledges the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (grant number 430-2016-00318).

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