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Introduction

Toward a Comprehensive Theory of Ethnic Party Formation and Performance

Political parties are the primary link between state and society in modern democracies. The quality of representation secured through parties and the responsiveness of party systems to the interests and demands of organized groups has a significant impact on the quality and the stability of democratic institutions. For that reason, one of the most enduring questions in political science is how social cleavages and collective interests are translated into party systems. In multiethnic societies, ethnic cleavages are likely to generate political parties and to organize political competition (Harmel and Robertson 1985: 503; Horowitz 1985: 291–3). Yet prior to the 1990s, there were few political parties in Latin America organized around ethnic identity, despite the ethnic diversity of the region. In the rare cases these existed they did not achieve enduring electoral success and had little impact on the political party system or the representation of their constituency in formal politics (Stavenhagen 1992: 434).[1]

In the 1990s, at the same time that many Latin American party systems began to exhibit severe stress and decomposition, indigenous social movement organizations increased their level of political mobilization and, in

[1] For example, in Chile as early as the 1940s, the Mapuche participated in elections as the Araucanian Corporation, winning several congressional and municipal council seats in 1945 and 1953. It was defeated in the 1957 elections and thereafter joined forces with leftist parties (Albó 1996: 819). In 1989 Chile's Aymara Indians formed the Party for Land and Identity, but it quickly disappeared after little success at the polls (Albó 1996: 850). In Bolivia several indigenous parties formed in the late 1970s and participated throughout the 1980s, but they individually never earned more than two percent of the vote until the 1990s. There have been even fewer parties organized around black identity. In Brazil the Frente Negra Brasileira (Brazilian Black Front) emerged in the 1930s, but was abolished after the 1937 military coup (Htun 2004a: 64–5)

some cases, formed political parties. Indigenous peoples are the descendants of the peoples and cultures existing in the Americas prior to the arrival of Europeans, who seek to preserve contemporary forms of these cultures within particular territories, while exercising considerable powers of self-government.[2] Some of the new parties that indigenous peoples' organizations formed in the 1990s achieved impressive results in a short period of time. In Ecuador, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) formed a party that was part of the coalition that won the 2002 presidential elections and two of its long-time leaders were appointed to the cabinet. In Bolivia, Quechua and Aymara coca growers formed a party that came within two percentage points of first place in the 2002 presidential elections. Although both parties formed in 1995, only seven years later they were contesting control of the government. What is more intriguing, this success is not limited to countries with large indigenous populations. In Colombia and Venezuela, where the indigenous proportion of the population does not exceed 3 percent, ethnic parties elected governors in several states and achieved representation in the national legislature in competition with more established and better-financed parties. Indigenous peoples also have formed parties in Argentina, Guyana, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru, with less impressive results. The convergence in time of these events suggests that there may be a relationship between the decomposition of established political party systems, the decline of class identities and cleavages, and the emergence of new parties organized around ethnicity, a newly politicized cleavage. And it raises questions: Why, after decades of dormancy, are ethnic cleavages becoming politically salient at a time when class cleavages appear to be eroding? Why, amidst a general deterioration of parties and their links to society, are indigenous peoples forming viable parties that are firmly rooted in vibrant social movements? Why are these parties successful in some countries and not in others?

[2] I use the U.N. Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to define *indigenous peoples*: "Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, considered themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present nondominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems" (United Nations 1986: para. 379). The term *Indian* is sometimes used to refer to indigenous individuals, in the absence of a noun form for indigenous.

I define an "ethnic party" as an organization authorized to compete in elections, the majority of whose leaders and members identify themselves as belonging to a nondominant ethnic group, and whose electoral platform includes among its central demands programs of an ethnic or cultural nature. While using the broader term "ethnic party" in order to relate my research to the literature on ethnic parties, this study focuses on parties based on an ethnic identity as "indigenous," as that term is defined in the preceding text. My definition of ethnic party includes entities that call themselves "political movements" in order to distance themselves from the negative connotations associated with political parties, but that otherwise meet the definition. I also include parties that incorporate nonindigenous candidates and form electoral alliances with nonindigenous parties and social movements, provided that ethnic rights and recognition are central to the party's platform and that Indians constitute at least half of the party's leadership. The ethnic homogeneity of members and the emphasis on ethnic demands within the party's platform may vary at different levels of the political system and across regions. For example, an ethnic party in Ecuador might be almost exclusively indigenous in an Amazonian province but incorporate more nonindigenous candidates in a semiurban highland province, and it might focus more on the issue of territorial autonomy in the former rather than the latter. I exclude from this category parties that are dependent clients of other parties.

Conventional explanations for the formation and performance of the new ethnic parties are not helpful. The proportional size of the ethnic population is not a determining factor because successful ethnic parties formed in countries with minuscule indigenous populations (Colombia, Venezuela) and performed poorly or failed to form at all in several countries with large populations (Peru and Guatemala). Ethnic parties are not a natural result of democratization in the 1980s and 1990s since this occurred almost everywhere, but successful ethnic parties were formed in a minority of countries. And their formation is not attributable solely to the collapse or decline of party systems, since one of the most spectacular collapses occurred in Peru, where ethnic parties have had little success.

As the performance of parties as channels for the expression of collective interests has declined, other forms of political representation have become more important (Roberts 2002a: 25). Social movements not only offer an equally effective means of expression, they often achieve substantive programmatic goals that parties are unable to deliver through deadlocked, fragmented, or corrupt legislatures. In some countries, indigenous

organizations can participate in elections without forming parties.[3] Why, then, did effective indigenous peoples' social movements form parties? This choice is particularly puzzling because indigenous movements' *raison d'etre* is the defense of indigenous cultural institutions and forms of self-government and the construction of new political institutions that strengthen traditional culture and authority while linking indigenous cultures to the state. Why, then, adopt a Western form of political struggle, subject to foreign logics and structures that indigenous movements claim to abhor? At least in countries where they comprise a substantial proportion of the electorate, why did indigenous organizations not instead choose to form alliances with existing parties and use their votes to demand programmatic benefits?

This book seeks to answer these questions. The broader theoretical questions the research illuminates are: Under what conditions do ethnic parties form and endure? Under what conditions will an ethnic cleavage emerge in a party system? Under what conditions do social movements generate electoral vehicles? These questions cut to the heart of contemporary theoretical and policy debates about democratization in Latin America. Although parties remain crucial to the quality of democracy in Latin America, particularly with respect to stability and representation (Levitsky and Cameron 2001: 1), parties and party systems in the region have suffered a marked deterioration in the last two decades.[4] Roberts notes the "severe erosion" of linkages between parties and voters and the resulting dampening of participation in parties, which he attributes to the dislocations and hardships caused by socioeconomic, political, and technological changes (2001: 17; 2002a). The 1990s saw the emergence of numerous "outsider" candidates that took advantage of declining public support for parties.[5] The personalist linkages they form

[3] For example, Guatemala since 1987, Colombia since 1991, Ecuador since 1995, and Venezuela since 1999.

[4] A chorus of recent studies bemoans the crisis of parties in Latin America, for example, Alcántara and Freidenberg (2001); Canton (1995); Coppedge (1998); Domínguez (1995); Levitsky (2001); Mainwaring (1999); Mainwaring and Scully (1995); and Roberts and Wibbels (1999).

[5] Latinobarometro's 2003 survey of public attitudes toward political institutions ranked parties last, with only 10–15 percent of respondents expressing "some" or "a lot" of confidence (FOCAL 2004: 3). This represents a considerable drop since 1998, when only 21 percent of the public reported "much" or "some" confidence in parties. Of the seventeen countries surveyed, those countries eliciting the largest number of "no confidence" responses were Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Panama, Nicaragua, Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia, in that order (Alcántara and Freidenberg 2001: Cuadro IV). All six countries in

have replaced organic links between parties and voters and are even less able to ensure that politicians are held accountable to voters (Roberts 2001: 22). The fragmentation of party systems and the lack of cohesion within parties have prevented the construction of durable legislative majorities, resulting in deadlocks and institutional crises (Levitsky and Cameron 2001: 3). Understanding how Latin American societies' most disadvantaged group achieved autonomous representation in political office at a time when most analysts are speaking of a crisis of representation or a crisis of parties will help us to identify conditions under which other social groups may gain effective representation.

Many of the region's most militant and influential indigenous peoples' movements, and its earliest and most successful ethnic parties, are located in the Andean region, the most multiethnic and ethnically divided in Latin America. In Andean countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela) a deep divide separates the subordinate indigenous population from the ruling white–mestizo population. Scholarly and policy interest in the region increased in the 1990s owing to its extraordinary political instability, stagnant or reversed economic development and social indicators, and increased rates of crime and violence (Arnson 2001; Mauceri and Burt 2004). Political scientists note the region's low levels of political party system institutionalization and high level of institutional deadlock, the recent collapse of party systems in Peru and Venezuela, and the severe fragmentation of party systems in Bolivia and Ecuador (Dietz and Myers 2001; *Journal of Democracy* 2001; Kornblith 1998; Levitzky 1999; Levitsky and Cameron 2001; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; McCoy et al. 1994; Roberts 2001; Romero 1994; Rospigliosi 1995; Tanaka 1998; Whitehead 2001). Yet, despite the importance of ethnic politics in the Andes, and the great scholarly and policy interest in the poor performance of parties, there has been little comparative research connecting these two phenomena.[6] Most consists of monographic studies of individual parties or countries. Political scientists have paid the most attention to Ecuador, which has

our study (all of the above except for Panama and Nicaragua) fall in the bottom half in terms of public support.

[6] Van Cott (2000a) and (2003b) are exceptions. Among the most interesting and truly comparative works are those by Jóhanna Kristín Birnir (2000, 2003). A 2001 edited volume surveyed the relationship between indigenous peoples and political parties more globally (Wessendorf 2001). It focuses mainly on indigenous peoples' alliances with existing parties and extraelectoral political strategies, while almost ignoring the new ethnic parties, apart from a brief paragraph on Ecuador's Pachakutik (Ruiz Hernández and Burguete Cal y Mayor 2001).

the ethnic party with the most stunning electoral success (Andolina 1999; Beck and Mijeski 2001; Collins 2000a, 2001; Pallares 2002; Selverston-Scher 2001). Scholarly research on the new ethnic parties in Bolivia produced by anthropologists and Bolivian political analysts is predominantly descriptive and interpretative (Albó 1994a; Ticona, Rojas, and Albó 1995; Various Authors 1997). To my knowledge, no other political scientist has investigated the equally interesting cases of Colombia and Venezuela, demonstrating a theoretically unjustified bias in favor of studying countries with proportionally large indigenous populations (Van Cott 2000b; 2003a).

The new ethnic parties in Latin America are not just interesting as ethnic parties. They also constitute examples of social movements or interest groups that launched electoral vehicles. Since the dawn of modern parties in the nineteenth century it has been commonplace for parties to develop from social movements or in close association with them, particularly in settings where parties have lost public support (Glenn 2003: 149). Their activities do not replace or stand in for party activity; rather, both types of activity tend to rise and decline together (Goldstone, ed. 2003: 4; Gunther and Montero 2002: 6). Yet there have been few studies of the relationship between social movements/interest groups and political parties, which usually are analyzed in separate literatures, or of why, and with what consequences, social movements might form political parties (Goldstone, ed. 2003; Thomas 2001b; Yishai 1994: 184). This is a research program that deserves further attention and "much more systematic analysis" (Tilly 2003: 255).

The new ethnic parties also are significant because in many cases they pose a fresh model of democratic representation, one that is more inclusive, deliberative, and participatory. The successful ones are programmatic parties with clear policy goals and ideologies. They have deep roots in society. Their leaders have been champions of transparency and have been at the forefront of the fight against corruption. Thus, the majority of the new ethnic parties exemplify the practices and values that political scientists find most beneficial for democracies, and which have been rare in Latin America since the return to elected civilian rule.

INSTITUTIONS, PARTY SYSTEMS, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The decision to form a political party and the factors that determine electoral success are complex. A comprehensive approach must combine an analysis of the permissiveness of the institutional environment, an

understanding of long-standing patterns and recent changes in the party system, as well as factors related to the opportunity structure in which social movements operate and the resources they are able to mobilize.

My approach diverges from traditional approaches, which assume that ethnic parties form automatically wherever ethnic identities are important sources of collective meaning because ethnic groups perceive their own shared interests and their shared sense of competition with other ethnic groups. Ethnic parties form to represent the internal dynamics of ethnic groups as distinct communities and in reaction to other groups in society. In addition, ethnic elites organize coethnics into parties in order to secure their particular interests. Because ethnic identity is ascriptive, ethnic elites understand that once they have captured their ethnic constituency they will be able to count on its support (Horowitz 1985: 293–5). Voters support ethnic parties in order to improve their access to material goods, mainly through improved access to the state, as well as to enhance their self-esteem by enhancing the status of their ethnic group (Horowitz 1985: 143).

This view complements the abundant literature on how social cleavages naturally give rise to political parties. It is based mainly on the work of Lipset and Rokkan, who observed that Western European party systems reflected underlying social cleavages, such as rural–urban, religious, and class cleavages (1967: 72–144). The social-cleavage approach is based on three assumptions: (1) that social identities determine voters' political interests; (2) that voters are aware of these interests and will vote accordingly; and (3) that they will do so consistently, which facilitates the institutionalization of political parties organized to represent these cleavage-dependent interests (Mainwaring 1999: 52). Similarly, scholars of the "materialist" school assume that those sharing an ethnic identity naturally have common material and psychic interests that they pursue through the formation of ethnic parties, which maximize their likelihood of attaining them. Where access to such jobs is influenced by ethnicity, as is common in Africa and Asia, ethnic elites form parties in order to secure them (Chandra 2004: 8).

The social-cleavage approach currently is out of favor because many cases have arisen to dispute its simplistic claims. As Chhibber observes, only under certain conditions can political parties activate social cleavages (1999: 6–8). An ethnic party's emergence requires the existence of an ethnic cleavage and the *politicization* of that cleavage, which most often occurs where access to public and private goods is determined by ethnicity. Ethnic cleavages became politicized in Latin America when indigenous

social movement organizations mobilized independently of nonindigenous political actors in favor of collective rights for indigenous peoples in massive mobilizations above the local level – a process underway in most countries by the 1980s. If ethnic parties form automatically in the presence of politicized ethnic cleavages, why did indigenous peoples not form ethnic parties as soon as ethnicity became politicized and they had received the right to vote?[7] In the rare cases where parties were formed, why were they not more successful?

I argue that political institutions and configurations of power within a party system help to determine the likelihood that ethnic parties will form and become successful. An open institutional environment, or a shift to more permissive constitutional provisions, laws, and rules that structure electoral competition, facilitates the formation of ethnic parties. Three changes are particularly important: decentralization, improved access to the ballot for aspiring parties, and the reservation of seats for ethnic minorities. Decentralization opens new playing fields for relatively weak political actors at local and regional levels, where indigenous peoples are often concentrated demographically and where fewer financial resources are necessary to compete. New laws that allow social movements to compete in elections without formally registering as political parties, or that made registration easier to achieve and maintain, enabled new ethnic parties to compete for the first time. Reserved seats for indigenous peoples provide a guaranteed foothold in the political system that indigenous movements can use to energize indigenous voters and to launch successful parties in nonindigenous districts.

A "frozen" political party system, one in which existing parties are entrenched and the axis of competition revolves around existing cleavages, may impede the formation of a new ethnic cleavage. But a relatively open system, one in which many voters lack loyalty to existing parties, or a change that significantly opens the system to new entrants, may lead to the emergence of ethnic parties. The electoral decline of established parties in the 1990s and the resulting increase in party system fragmentation helped to erode existing party loyalties. The increased number of parties gaining votes in the system lowered the threshold of votes needed to secure representation and increased the leverage of small parties in legislative bodies. Another type of party system change – the decline of the left – contributed significantly to the success of ethnic parties. It opened

[7] Literacy requirements prevented many Indians from voting in Ecuador until 1979, Peru until 1980, and Brazil until 1985.

space on the left of the political spectrum for ethnic parties to make class-based appeals to the poor, adjusted the balance of power between the traditional left and indigenous movements in favor of the latter, and made experienced political operatives and resources available to fledgling ethnic parties.

A permissive institutional environment and/or open party system constitute necessary conditions. They are not sufficient to explain the formation and performance of ethnic parties. Party formation requires political actors to make a conscious, strategic decision, which occurs under particular conditions. Electoral performance is determined by a variety of factors related to the qualities and resources of the new vehicle, its leaders, and its constituency. The resources available to movements include the inspirational example of successful ethnic parties in neighboring countries, which emboldened social movement leaders to take the electoral plunge, even under adverse circumstances. Viable ethnic parties studied here were spawned by well-institutionalized indigenous social-movement organizations. In contrast, ethnic elites lacking the support of a well-rooted and institutionalized organization failed in their attempts to form ethnic parties.

Indigenous community-level organizations with their own leadership structures, kinship ties, and customary law have existed since the invasion of Europeans destroyed political organizations of larger geographical scope. In some areas, supra-community organizations persisted or were newly formed to facilitate economic production, the reproduction of indigenous cultures, and the defense of collectively held territory. Between the 1920s and 1950s political parties and leftist movements formed dependent peasant organizations in order to co-opt and control indigenous voters and rural workers. These organizations struggled for access to land and for improved wages and employment conditions for agricultural workers. In the 1960s and 1970s, the nature and scope of such organizations changed. Many that had been subordinated to political parties, labor unions, and the Church asserted their autonomy. Independent indigenous organizations also formed and espoused a more diverse set of cultural, economic, and political demands. Although these often adopted Western forms of political organization and relied upon external support, they struggled to maintain independence and were explicitly oriented toward defending cultural and ethnic rights and to advancing long-standing territorial claims, as opposed to the limited set of socio-economic demands that the left promoted. The authoritarian context in which they emerged restricted the achievements and geographic reach

of indigenous organizations. Throughout Latin America independent indigenous organizations endured violent repression. In nominally democratic Colombia and Venezuela, Indians organized mainly in defense of land rights, which pitted them against armed groups defending the claims of landowners.

The regionwide transition to democracy gradually opened up space for existing organizations to mobilize more effectively and for new organizations to form. Domestic and international nongovernmental organizations became interested in the concerns of indigenous peoples, particularly with respect to their human rights and the protection of their natural habitat. Their financial support and advocacy helped fledgling organizations to expand (Brysk 2000; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Neoliberal reforms imposed in the 1980s threatened collective property rights, reduced access to markets, and cut state subsidies to small farmers (Brysk and Wise 1997; Yashar 1998), although many indigenous peoples never benefited from such programs. In response to these threats to their economic survival, and in order to press more effectively their cultural and territorial rights claims, the number of indigenous organizations grew rapidly throughout Latin America during this period and existing local organizations united to form larger regional and national organizations.[8] Their emphasis on opposition to neoliberal reforms helped the movements to attract numerous nonindigenous supporters and to form interethnic popular alliances.

By the time states in the region embarked on a series of far-reaching constitutional changes in the 1990s, indigenous organizations had become consolidated in most Latin American countries, with hierarchical leadership structures and a multi-tiered network of affiliates. Although some countries had reformed their constitutions at the time of the transition to democracy, by the mid-1990s it was clear that institutional problems prevented the consolidation of legitimate, governable democratic regimes. To address these problems, political elites undertook a second wave of reforms. Elsewhere, significant constitutional reforms had not occurred for decades and elites and civil society organizations pressed for radical reforms to modernize the state and legitimize ailing democratic regimes. Indigenous social movement organizations were among the civil society

[8] On the rise of indigenous movements in the 1970s and 1980s, see Albó (1994b); Gros (1997); Stavenhagen (1992; 1996); Van Cott (1994; 2000b); Wade (1997); and Yashar (1998, 2005).