

# **On the Link Between Ethnic Politics and Identification: Lessons from Bolivia**

Paper prepared for the Political Studies Association International Conference 2013

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Comments welcome.

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## **Abstract**

The politicization of ethnic diversity has long been regarded as perilous to ethnic peace and national unity, its detrimental impact memorably illustrated in Northern Ireland or Rwanda. The process of indigenous mobilization in Bolivia over the past decade has hence been seen with some concern by observers in policy and academia alike. This paper presents an analysis of the link between ethnic politics and identification in Bolivia by, first, qualitatively examining the development of political identity discourses and, second, quantitatively examining two dimensions of indigenous identification through time-series survey data. The analyses show that ethnic identifications do indeed change with changing political discourses, that they do so more quickly than expected, and not necessarily in the manner as expected: the type of reaction in identification depends on the type of dominant discourse, demonstrating that it is necessary to distinguish different elements of ethnic identification.