

**BOLETIN PNUD
& INSTITUTO DE
IBEROAMÉRICA**

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February 2011

**Indigenous Peoples,
Democracy, and
Representation:
The Cases of Bolivia and
Guatemala**



Introduction

For decades, indigenous peoples have been marginalized and excluded from decision-making spheres in their own countries. In Latin America, this trend started to change during the 1980s and 1990s, with the emergence of indigenous movements, which transformed indigenous peoples into key political actors. However, it was not until more recently that indigenous peoples began to gain positions of political representation, first at the local and regional level, and then at the national level. This representation has come in the form of independent candidates, individual candidates within other political parties (Mexico or Chile), through special constituencies (Colombia, Venezuela, Peru), or even through indigenous political parties, as in Ecuador or Bolivia. Thus, the variation in degrees, levels, and forms of representation is enormous, and representation has been more effective in some countries than in others.

This paper describes the extent to which indigenous peoples obtain effective representation of their interests in their own countries' legislatures. In order to demonstrate this, survey data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) AmericasBarometer¹ and interviews with legislators from the Parliamentary Elites in Latin America Project (PELA) of the University of Salamanca have been analyzed. The analysis focuses on the Bolivian (2006) and Guatemalan (2008) cases. These cases have been selected because both countries have the largest indigenous populations proportionally in Latin America (above 60% according to the International Labor Organization²), and they have data available for legislators from the latest legislative period.³

The analysis is mainly descriptive,⁴ as a way to distinguish attitudes, political behaviors, or preferences among citizens, depending on their self-identifications as indigenous or non-indigenous.⁵ When there are significant statistical differences between these groups, we analyze the distribution of these attitudes and preferences within the legislative bodies, and we examine if there are significant differences between the deputies elected in districts with a majority indigenous population (La Paz, Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, Oruro, and Potosí in Bolivia; and Chimaltenango, Sorora, Totonicapan, Huehuetenango, Quiche, and Alta and Baja Verapaz in Guatemala) and those elected in districts with a majority non-indigenous population⁶ (Santa Cruz, Pando, and Tarija in Bolivia; and El Progreso, Sacatepequez, Escuintla, Santa Rosa, Quetzaltenango, Peten, Izabal, Zapaca, Chiquimula, Jalapa, and Jutiapa in Guatemala).

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¹ The data analyzed in this document have been provided by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP): <http://www.LapopSurveys.org>. However, the analysis and interpretation are exclusively the author's responsibility.

² <http://www.oit.or.cr/mdtsanjo/indig/cuadro.htm>.

³ As the objective is to find out if legislators effectively represent the constituent interests, LAPOP data corresponding to the first year of the new legislative period were used (this is because constituent interests must exist prior to those expressed by the legislators)

⁴ For this, crosstabs and T tests for independent samples have been used.

⁵ In Guatemala, this variable has been codified from the following question: "Do you consider yourself indigenous, *ladino* or *garifuna*?" In the Bolivian case, as the categorization is wider, the codification was based on the question "Do you consider yourself a member of one of the following ethnic groups?" This much more accurate question was not included in the 2008 Guatemalan questionnaire.

⁶ In the PELA Project there is no question regarding ethnic self-identification. Those departments that did not conform to the indigenous and non-indigenous categories were considered "mixed departments."

Some Important Concepts

Representative government is the result of an attempt to apply democratic principles over a large-scale sociopolitical area: the nation-state (Dahl 2000). Thus, most political scientists have chosen a limited definition of democracy, based on free and fair elections, and on the theory of representative government. However, these conceptions in theory are supposed to apply to internally homogenous communities (according to the ideal type of nation-state), although the reality is much more complex. Many states in the world comprise various communities that are different from one another. This is the case of countries that have indigenous populations within their borders. When indigenous peoples have a political discourse different from the one held by the rest of society, and ethnic membership becomes a key component of this political discourse, we are faced with a situation of “identity politics.” This means that politics are organized around identity issues, which can create cleavages and structure political competition at various levels (Brysk 2009). According to the theory of deliberative democracy, it is important that all voices have access to public political debate; thus, the political representation of different ethnic groups is essential for an inclusive democracy (Kymlicka y Norman 1995; Habermas 2000). Presently, in most countries, this debate takes place only in legislative arenas. Therefore, if a differentiated indigenous discourse or concrete indigenous interests do exist, it is important that these differences are reflected in legislative bodies. Otherwise, democracies would be deficient.

The degree of political representation of various ethnic groups in arenas of political decision making differs within each country and between countries. This variability is linked to the type of representation generated by the electoral system. Thus, two models can be distinguished: descriptive democracy (when the ethnic composition of the political arena reflects the ethnic composition of the country or the electoral district as a whole), and substantive representation (different interests within society, usually linked to concrete government programs, are represented according to their distribution in society).⁷ Currently, substantive representation prevails both in institutional designs and in citizens’ preferences. For example, this is the case in Bolivia⁸ where, according to the data analyzed, the majority of indigenous people (76.2%) and non-indigenous people (80.3%) prefer a capable leader, regardless of his or her ethnic origin.⁹

The degree of representation is also linked to the types of spaces available for ethnic representation (integrated or parallel) and to the administrative and political level (national or local) where they exist. Nevertheless, this report will focus on the representation of society’s political preferences in the national-level lower chambers.

Problems Perceived as Most Serious by the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Populations of Bolivia and Guatemala

In order to verify if there is adequate representation of indigenous interests in Congress, first we must determine if there are significant differences between indigenous and non-indigenous preferences. Otherwise, there would be no reason to talk about indigenous political interests. Through analyzing LAPOP data, we find

⁷ For a more extensive differentiation between these two models, see Phillips (1999).

⁸ This question was not included in the 2008 Guatemalan survey.

⁹ Even though this trend is significantly greater among non-indigenous people (0.021).

that indigenous and non-indigenous people disagree on the importance given to certain problems that their countries suffer, on ideological self-placement, and on certain attitudes towards democracy.

In Bolivia, there are significant differences with regard to the relevance given to a series of problems. Thus, we can distinguish between largely indigenous and largely non-indigenous concerns.¹⁰ Table 1 reflects two dimensions: from greater to lesser importance (top-down reading) and from most particularly indigenous to most particularly non-indigenous (left-right reading). This means that those problems located in the upper row are the problems considered most important, because they are mentioned by the greatest percentage of the sample. On the other extreme, problems located in the bottom row are considered as the most serious by a very small percentage of the sample. Similarly, the farther a problem falls from the central column (corrected standardized residuals from -1.5 to +1.5), the more significant the difference between indigenous and non-indigenous perceptions of its importance. If a problem lies to the left, it means that a significantly higher percentage of indigenous people consider this problem as the most serious. On the other hand, if a problem is on the right side of the table, this matter will be perceived as the most serious one by a significantly higher percentage of non-indigenous people.

The greatest disparities are those related to environmental issues (indigenous concern); “bad government” (non-indigenous concern); lack of land to farm (non-indigenous concern); uncertainty (non-indigenous concern); and racial problems (non-indigenous concern). Other relevant differences are related to economic issues but above all to hydrocarbons (indigenous concern) and the issue of autonomy (non-indigenous concern). This last problem is considered the most important by a very small percentage of the sample. However, the percentage of non-indigenous people (3.5 %) who believe this to be of greatest importance almost doubles the percentage of indigenous people (1.9%) of the same opinion. This is influenced by the fact that non-indigenous people make up the majority in the Media Luna departments (whose populations demand greater autonomy from the central government).¹¹

¹⁰ Calculated from the corrected typified residuals.

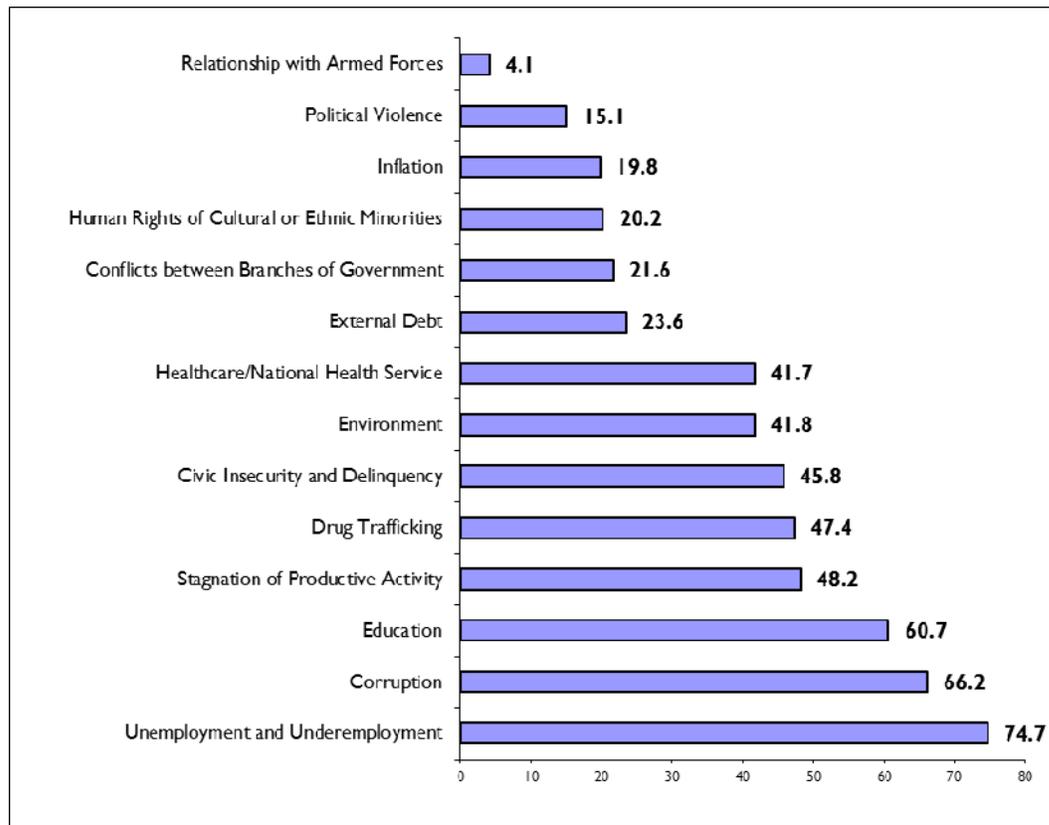
¹¹ The “Media Luna” departments are Tarija, Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando.

Table I: Most Serious Problems Perceived by Bolivian Society

	Concerns		
Importance	Indigenous	Neutral	Non-indigenous
Very important More than 10%	Economic crisis	Unemployment Poverty	
Quite important Between 5 and 10%		Corruption	
Not very important Between 0.5 and 5%	Hydrocarbons Environment Poor State of Roadways	Popular Protests Crime Politicians Lack of Unity Constituent Assembly Inequality Discrimination Drug trafficking Gangs	Bad Government Political Autonomies Inflation Education Lack of Security Lack of Land to Farm Uncertainty

Source: The author, based on LAPOP database

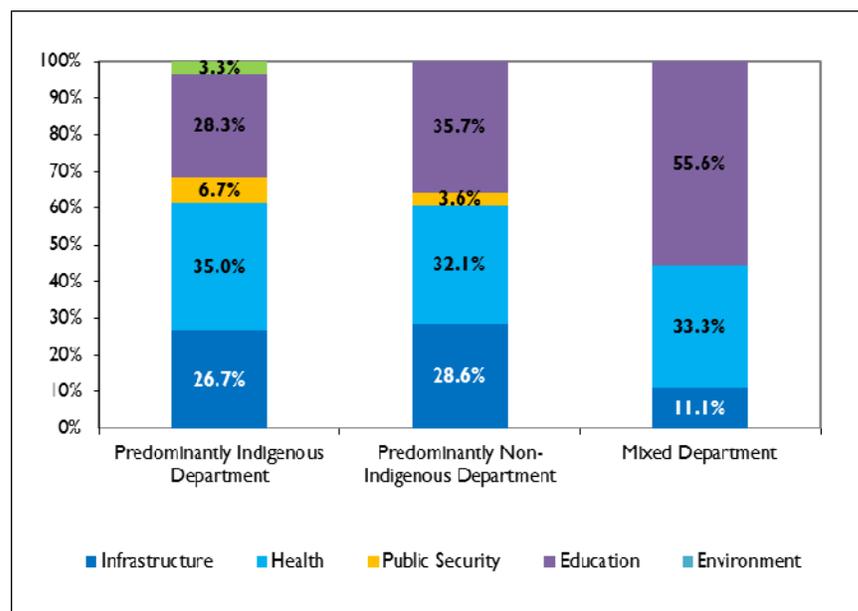
Regarding the importance given to some problems by the deputies, the results are presented in Figure I. From this graph, we can see that deputies generally pay attention to the most important neutral problems (such as unemployment and corruption), followed by the least important concern for the non-indigenous community (education, considered important by a very limited percentage of deputies from mostly indigenous departments) and by a very important concern for the indigenous community (the stagnation of productivity).

Figure 1: Percentage of Bolivian Deputies that Give Great Importance to the Following Problems

Source: The author, based on PELA database

However, there is another way to contrast the importance legislators give to specific issues; that is observing how legislators direct public expenditures. The results presented in Figure 2 show that legislators from indigenous departments give more importance than deputies from non-indigenous departments to health, security and environmental issues. However, legislators from mainly non-indigenous departments (the Bolivian Media Luna), give greater importance to education (which fits with non-indigenous community preferences) and to infrastructure issues (although the difference with legislators from mainly indigenous departments is minimal).

Figure 2: Public Expenditure Area to which Legislators would Dedicate the Greatest Share of the Budget (Bolivia)



Source: The author, based on PELA database

In the Guatemalan case, the biggest differences can be found, on the one hand, around issues related to lack of security and violence (non-indigenous concerns) and to basic needs, such as lack of water, unemployment or the quality of education (indigenous concerns). On the other hand, it stands out that there is a consensus that crime is the country's main problem (39.5% of indigenous people and 41.1% of non-indigenous people agree that this is the main problem of the administration of Alvaro Colom).

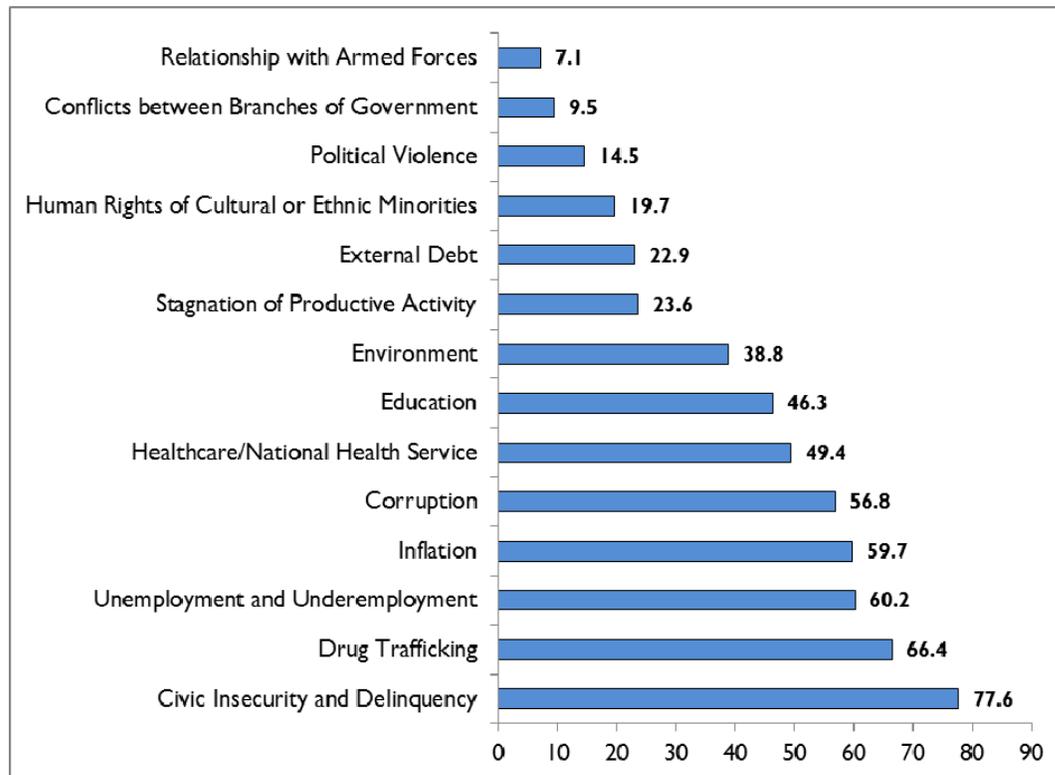
Table 2: Main concerns of Guatemalan society

Importance	Concerns		
	Indigenous	Neutral	Non-indigenous
Very Important More than 10%		Crime	Violence
Quite Important Between 5 than 10%		Poverty	Economic problems
Not very Important Between 0.5 and 5%	Unemployment Education Lack of water War against terrorism	Corruption Gangs	Lack of Security

Source: The author, based on LAPOP database

Again, the importance given by the deputies to some of these problems is summed up in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Percentage of Guatemalan Deputies who Give Great Importance to a Series of Problems

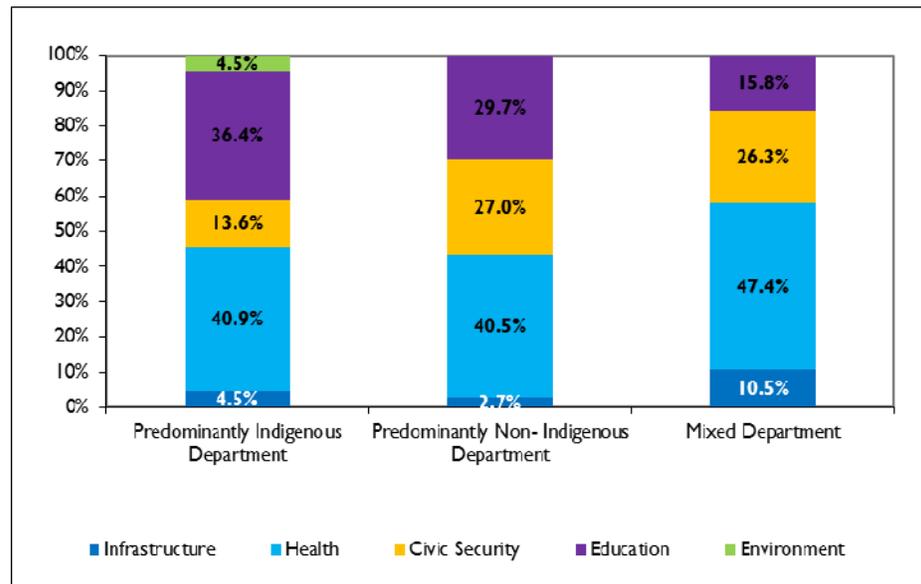


Source: The author, based on PELA database

From this graph, we can conclude that in Guatemala deputies pay greatest attention to the main neutral concerns or to the main non-indigenous concerns (that is to say, issues related to security and economic problems), although it is also true that 60% of legislators think that the problem of unemployment (a predominantly indigenous concern) is of great importance.

However, again there are interesting differences when it comes to deciding how public funds should be allocated (Figure 4). Even though Guatemalan legislators from both kinds of departments, predominantly indigenous and predominantly non-indigenous, agree that it is necessary to allocate the lion's share of the public expenditure budget to the areas of health and education, there are important differences on how much to spend on the security (27% of non-indigenous department legislators think that more funds should be expended, versus 13% of indigenous department legislators). As expected, Guatemalan deputies from non-indigenous departments are much more concerned about issues related to public safety (almost two times more concerned) than their legislative colleagues. The latter would allocate more funds to education, infrastructure and the environment. Therefore, the environment seems to be a unique concern of predominantly indigenous departments both in Bolivia and Guatemala.

Figure 4: Areas of Public Expenditure to which Legislators Would Dedicate the Greatest Share of the Budget (Guatemala)



Source: The author, based on PELA database

It is interesting to note the fact that neither in Bolivia nor in Guatemala are ethnic minority rights an important concern for legislators in general. Moreover, if we compare both countries, we find that education is an important concern for citizens of both countries, but it is not the most important one. By contrast, for legislators of both countries, it is in fact one of the main concerns. Nevertheless, perhaps most interesting is that in both Bolivia and Guatemala differences between predominantly indigenous and predominantly non-indigenous departments regarding this issue are well reflected in Congress. Thus, in Bolivia, where education is an important concern for non-indigenous people, the percentage of legislators would allocate most of the budget to education is higher among legislators from predominantly non-indigenous departments. In Guatemala, the opposite is true, and education is an indigenous concern. Thus, legislators from predominantly indigenous departments are more inclined to allocate most of the budget to education in that country.

Ideology

With respect to ideology, the same pattern is observed in both countries. In both Bolivia and Guatemala there is a significant difference between indigenous and non-indigenous citizens in terms of ideological self-placement, and indigenous peoples place themselves to the left of non-indigenous citizens. On a 1-10 scale, where 1 means “extreme left” and 10 “extreme right,” Bolivian indigenous people place themselves at 5.01 on average, while non-indigenous people place themselves at 5.70 on average. In Guatemala, indigenous people position themselves at 5.49 on average, and non-indigenous people at 6.01 on average.

An additional similarity between both countries is that there are not significant ideological differences between deputies elected in predominantly indigenous or predominantly non-indigenous departments.

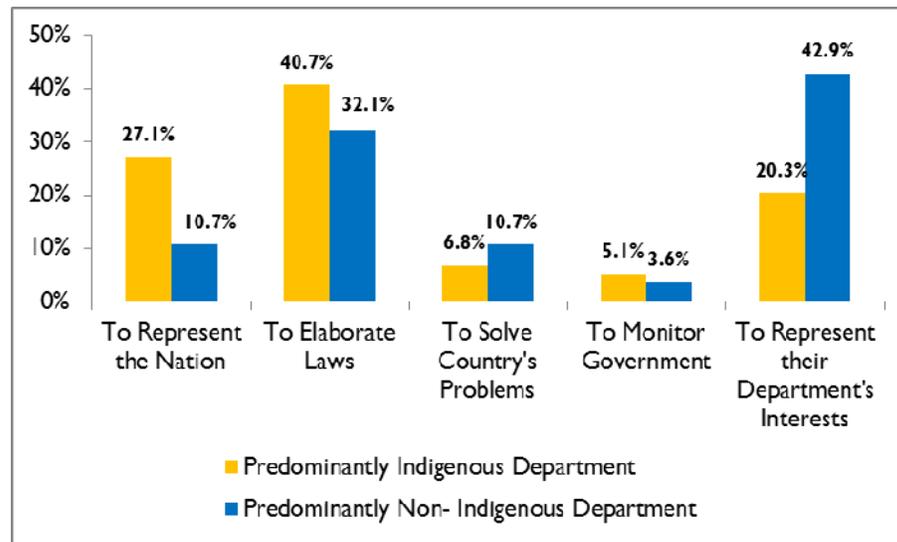
Relationships between Representatives and the Represented

Until now, we have analyzed those issues that could create ethnic cleavages within Bolivian and Guatemalan society. However, in order for a problem perceived as important to appear in public, political debate, there must be political actors who develop a coherent discourse and take a position. At this point, it is important to distinguish between the presence of a strong indigenous movement and indigenous political parties in Bolivia, and the absence of indigenous political parties in Guatemala along with a weak Mayan indigenous movement (Martí 2008).¹² Therefore, we can expect a stronger link between representatives and constituents in Bolivia than in Guatemala.

Thus, regarding constituents' trust in their representatives, in Bolivia there are no significant differences between indigenous and non-indigenous people when it comes to requesting help from congressional deputies, but there is a significant difference when it comes to requesting help from local authorities (25.3% of indigenous people versus 5.4% of non-indigenous people). Although the general pattern is not to request help, Bolivian indigenous peoples turn to mayors or councilors (25.4%) more often than to deputies or senators (7.3%). That means that indigenous people trust local representatives more than national representatives. This may be related to the fact that Bolivian legislators elected in predominantly indigenous departments, even though they are mainly linked to their departments, tend to be more oriented to national politics than non-indigenous department legislators and, thus, may be perceived as distant representatives by indigenous people.

Generally, most Bolivian deputies say that they vote taking into account their department's needs, but this is even more common among non-indigenous department legislators (85.7% versus 73.6% of indigenous department legislators). Additionally, 42.9% of non-indigenous department deputies state that their main task is to represent their department's interests (compared to 20.3% of indigenous department legislators who share that view). At the same time, 27.1% of indigenous department legislators think that their main task is to represent the country, compared to 10.7% of non-indigenous department legislators who share that opinion (Figure 5).

¹² These differences are caused by the intense armed conflict that occurred in Guatemala and did not occur in Bolivia or Ecuador (Falla 1992; Figueroa Ibarra 1999). In Guatemala this conflict was in fact a genocide, which inhibits collective action and indigenous organization (Yashar 2005; Martí 2008) and the lack of decentralization (Van Cott 2005; Martí: 2008), which makes the first steps for local organization possible.

Figure 5: Main Task as a Bolivian Legislator

Source: The author, based on PELA database

On the other hand, there are no differences in terms of political behavior and trust in the political process. The vast majority of indigenous people (91.2%) and of non-indigenous people (90.4%) voted in the 2005 elections. However, significant differences do exist when it comes to participating in public protests. Bolivian indigenous people are much more mobilized (33.6% of indigenous people versus 18.1% of non-indigenous people).¹³ In fact, some authors state that it is impossible to understand changes in the Bolivian political landscape if we do not take into account the importance of indigenous movements (Rodas 2006; Toranzo Roca 2006). This is related to the fact that indigenous peoples in Bolivia have a conception of democracy that is much more direct and participatory, as can be seen below.

Regarding political parties, both indigenous and non-indigenous people in Bolivia think that civic associations can better represent their interests than any other kind of organizations.¹⁴ Performing a means comparison test, indigenous people trust native authorities and unions more than non-indigenous people, with no significant differences in trust in political parties. This contrasts with the level of trust in political parties that Bolivian deputies of both kinds of departments have. Among non-indigenous department legislators 85.7% report little or no trust in political parties, while 67.2% of indigenous department deputies share this view.

Nevertheless, linking political parties with attitudes towards democracy, it is interesting to note that, although the majority of both groups think that political parties are necessary for democracy to function, indigenous people to a greater extent believe that political parties are indispensable.¹⁵ In contrast, there are very significant differences between deputies regarding the role of political parties in democracy. Although most deputies of both departments agree “there cannot be democracy without political parties,” 19.7% of indigenous

¹³ Data obtained from LAPOP.

¹⁴ This may be due to the fact that, at the beginning, the Bolivian indigenous movement had support from organizations that were not linked to political parties, since these parties did not represent indigenous interests. Therefore, the movement was based more in social organizations, like the Catholic Church (Alcántara and Marengi 2007).

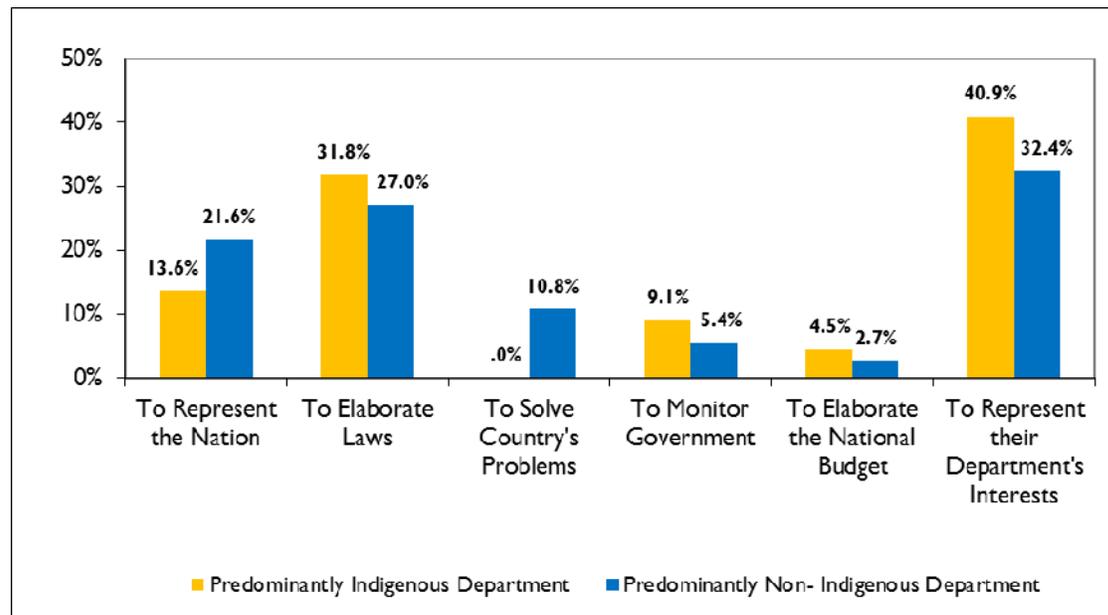
¹⁵ In response to the question regarding whether political parties are necessary to represent citizens' interests, 60.4% of indigenous citizens think that they are necessary, versus 56.7% of non-indigenous citizens who share this view.

department legislators declare that they do not agree at all with this statement. This means that they think it is possible for democracy to exist without political parties.

In Guatemala, although most citizens, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, refrain from asking the authorities for help, indigenous people are more inclined to ask for help from both deputies and local authorities, especially the latter. Regarding citizens' perceptions towards deputies, Guatemalan non-indigenous people believe to a greater extent than indigenous people that Congress impedes the President's work and that deputies waste time.

This coincides with a stronger link between indigenous department legislators and their departments. Thus, although the majority of Guatemalan deputies say that they vote taking into account their department's needs, this tendency is stronger for predominantly indigenous department legislators (90.9% versus 66.7%). And even though most deputies say that their main task is to represent their department's interests (Figure 6), this response is more frequent among indigenous department legislators (40.9% versus 32.4%).

Figure 6: Main Task of Guatemalan Legislators



Source: The author, based on PELA database

With regard to political behavior, we again find no differences in voting between indigenous and non-indigenous citizens. However, although most Guatemalan citizens do not attend the meetings of political parties or movements, indigenous people say they attend these meetings to a greater extent (compared to non-indigenous people). These differences are especially significant for those who attend weekly or annual meetings. On the other hand, there are no significant differences when it comes to engaging in demonstrations or public protests. It is interesting to note that indigenous people are more fearful of engaging in this kind of political participation. In Guatemala, indigenous people have a less direct conception of democracy than in Bolivia, because they are less in favor of direct participation and they generally delegate more to political parties and representatives (compared to Bolivian indigenous people). Furthermore, when asked "who governs in a democracy?"

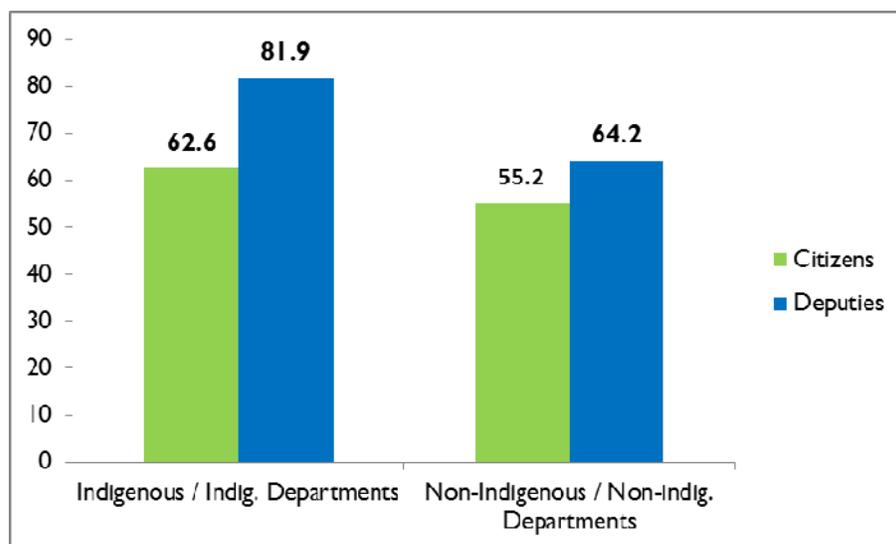
Guatemalan indigenous people are less inclined than their Bolivian counterparts to respond: “in a democracy, the people govern.”

Finally, performing a means comparison test, we can see that Guatemalan indigenous people have more trust in political parties than the non-indigenous, and these differences are greater for trust in indigenous movements. By contrast, there are no significant differences between the two groups regarding the level of agreement with the statement that democracy can exist without political parties. In both cases, both groups take a neutral position. However, more indigenous department legislators tend to agree that “there cannot be democracy without political parties” (78.9% versus 60.1%). In contrast, non-indigenous department legislators do not trust political parties or the Parliament as much.

Attitudes towards Democracy

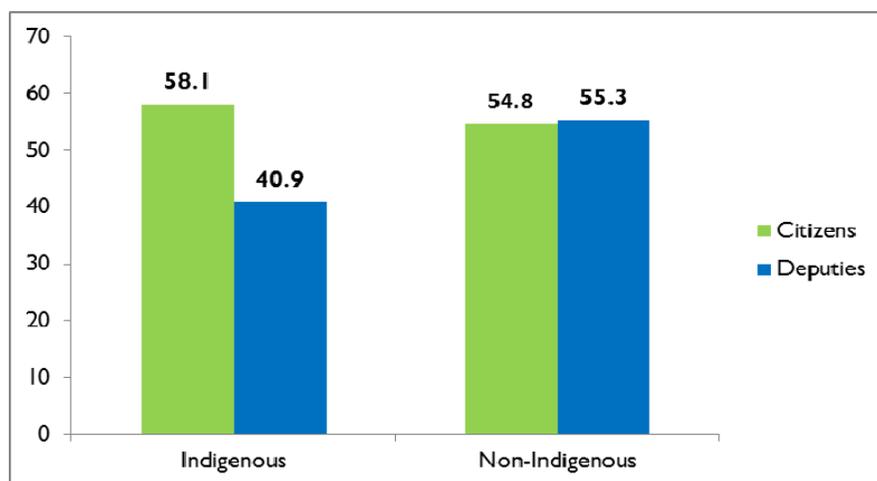
Indigenous Bolivians have a more direct and participatory notion of democracy than indigenous Guatemalans. With respect to these conceptions, although most indigenous and non-indigenous citizens agree with the statement “in a democracy, citizens govern through their representatives,” there are some significant differences on related issues. Indigenous Bolivians tend to think that “the people rule,” while non-indigenous people tend to think that “the government and legislators rule.” Further, although both groups mostly agree on the necessity of a president open to dialogue, non-indigenous people are more in favor of a strong president. This coincides with the fact that indigenous people agree to a greater extent than non-indigenous people with the statement “democracy is superior to any other kind of government.”

Finally, and given this conception of democracy, indigenous people are more satisfied with democracy in Bolivia than non-indigenous people (Figure 7). In contrast, these differences among citizens are not reflected as strongly in the Lower Chamber, where there are not significant differences in attitudes towards democracy (all legislators agree that a democratic regime is always preferable). Nevertheless, differences between indigenous and non-indigenous are embodied in attitudes related to satisfaction with democracy, as legislators from indigenous departments (81.9%) are more satisfied with democracy than those from non-indigenous departments (64.2%).

Figure 7: Percentage of Bolivian Citizens and Deputies Satisfied with their Own Democracy

Source: The author, based on LAPOP and PELA databases (1994-2010)

In Guatemala, there are no significant differences in satisfaction with democracy among citizens (Figure 8) or in perceptions of how democratic the country is.

Figure 8: Percentage of Guatemalan Citizens and Deputies Satisfied with their Own Democracy

Source: The author, based on LAPOP and PELA databases (1994-2010)

Nonetheless, significant differences do exist in terms of attitudes towards democracy, though most Guatemalan citizens state that though democracy may have problems, it is better than any other form of government (72.8 % of indigenous people and 68.5% of non-indigenous people). It is the differences in non-democratic attitudes that are especially interesting: on one hand, 17.8% of indigenous people think that in some circumstances an authoritarian government is preferable to a democratic one (versus 10.9% of non-indigenous peoples); and, on the other hand, 17.2% of non-indigenous citizens state that, for people like them, it does not matter whether a regime is democratic or non-democratic (versus 13.7% of indigenous people).

Furthermore, analyzing perceptions regarding the necessity of a strong leader, it can be observed that, although the majority of Guatemalan people think electoral democracy is the best system, there are significant differences between groups. While 20.7% of non-indigenous people prefer a strong leader over electoral democracy, 16.1 % of indigenous people share that view (these differences are statistically significant). There are also interesting differences in terms of questioning authority: 50.3% of non-indigenous people think that citizens should question authorities, versus 38.4% of indigenous people. This implies that 61.6% of indigenous citizens think that more respect should be shown for the authority of leaders. On the other hand, indigenous people are more inclined to think that citizens should govern directly and not through elected representatives.

At the deputy level, the greatest differences are related to satisfaction with democracy. Only 40.9% of predominantly indigenous department legislators declare that they are satisfied with their own country's democracy, in comparison with 55.3% of non-indigenous department deputies who share the same view (Figure 8).

Conclusions

The representation of indigenous interests in Bolivia's and Guatemala's lower chambers is real but complex. Existing ideological differences between indigenous and non-indigenous people are not reflected in the Congress. Although legislators generally pay attention to major "ethnically neutral" concerns, it is also true that major indigenous concerns are also dealt with in the legislature. This is more evident at the electoral district level. At this level it is noticeable that legislators are sensitive to their department's problems, as can be seen with regard to issues of education or security in Guatemala.

The links established between representatives and constituents through the departments are essential. Thus, it can be observed that the more sensitive legislators are to their department's demands, the more trust constituents show towards legislative bodies (towards both legislatures and legislators). Likewise, the extent of the connection between deputies and their departments will depend upon which of the two groups—indigenous or non-indigenous—govern at the national level. In Bolivia, where MAS (an indigenous political party led by Evo Morales) rules, deputies from predominantly indigenous districts are much more oriented to national politics and national interests, while predominantly non-indigenous department deputies state they are more interested in representing their department's needs. The opposite is true in Guatemala, where the ruling administration is non-indigenous. In this case, deputies from predominantly indigenous constituencies believe to a greater extent that their duty is to represent their department's interests.

Finally, both in Bolivia and in Guatemala, indigenous people have a less elitist conception of democracy than non-indigenous people, although the Bolivian conception of democracy is more direct than the Guatemalan one (Guatemalan indigenous people prefer a democracy where participation is carried out through traditional political organizations, away from the streets, and where people respect authorities instead of criticizing them). These differences probably influence satisfaction with democracy, since satisfaction is higher in Bolivia than in Guatemala. The interesting thing is that, in Bolivia, legislators from predominantly indigenous departments are the most satisfied with Bolivian democracy, while, in Guatemala, deputies from predominantly indigenous departments are the least satisfied with Guatemalan democracy.

These conclusions require further and deeper research, analyzing not only the representation of interests and general attitudes in Congress, but also the intermediation of political parties on the basis of their platforms and discourses. Nevertheless, we can conclude that indigenous and non-indigenous people have distinct preferences and attitudes, and that these differences are reflected in the Congress, even if not always in an efficient way.

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