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1

The Puzzle of Indigenous Autonomy

Como indios nos explotaron, como indios nos liberaremos. [They exploited us as Indians, we will liberate ourselves as Indians.]

—BOLIVIAN KATARISTAS (CITED IN ALBÓ 2002B, 80)

THE BOLIVIAN Vice-Ministry of Autonomy, housed in the recently completed Casa Grande del Pueblo skyscraper, overlooks the rugged cityscape of the capital of La Paz. The 2009 Constitution, which was issued on the same day the Vice-Ministry was created, provided a path for the country's majority-Indigenous municipalities to become politically autonomous by replacing municipal governments with traditional Indigenous ones. On one wall of the Vice-Ministry's office hangs a map of Bolivia with markers to indicate the Indigenous municipalities that have achieved autonomy. Just over 200 municipalities—out of over 300—qualify for autonomous status. Yet, as of 2023, there were only three pins in the Vice-Ministry's map. Thirty-six other municipalities have started the process, but only six remain actively engaged in it. I asked an official why so few municipalities have pursued autonomy. His response: "*Cuanto tiempo tienes?* [How much time do you have?]"

Scholars and observers have long regarded autonomy as the central demand of Indigenous populations (Díaz-Polanco 1998; Van Cott 2001; Zuñiga Navarro 1998).¹ According to this logic, marginalized native groups experience unequal access to state institutions and markets, and thus seek a government-recognized territorial space—within an existing nation-state—in which they can freely and legitimately exercise authority. The expected

1. Autonomy is also regarded as the core demand of other territorially based and historically marginalized ethnic groups (Brubaker et al. 2018, 346–347).

benefits of autonomy over other outcomes are several. Unlike assimilation or integration, autonomy does not require Indigenous groups to abandon their cultural identities or their long-standing institutions, thus promising an alternative path to development. Autonomy may also be preferable to independence or secession because it preserves access to costly public goods, such as national defense, which the state continues to provide (Ghai 2000, 8; Hechter 2000, 157). The presumed benefits of autonomy are reflected in the headline of an opinion piece in Canada's largest newspaper, which claimed, "There is only one solution to the complex challenges facing Indigenous peoples in Canada: a rapid move toward Indigenous autonomy" (Coates 2022).

Yet, a growing body of empirical evidence from across the Americas—including the Bolivian case discussed above—suggests that Indigenous groups are highly divided over their preferences for autonomy. In 1995, one-third of Indigenous municipalities in Oaxaca, Mexico opted against replacing municipal governments with traditional, Indigenous assemblies (*usos y costumbres*).² In Ecuador, majority-Indigenous municipalities have had the legal right to adopt traditional political institutions for over a decade, but fewer than 3 percent have done so. Only two Peruvian Indigenous collectives, the Wampis and Awajun Nations, have successfully lobbied for political autonomy. Beyond Latin America, the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, which promised an expansion of Native groups' autonomy, was rejected by a third of tribes in the United States. In Canada, the 1995 Inherent Right Act offered greater autonomy to the country's nearly 700 tribal bands. By 2018, just 32 bands had concluded negotiations with the government, and only about 50 others had started the process.

Indigenous peoples' unexpectedly uneven embrace of autonomy presents a series of puzzles often overlooked in the existing literature. Why do some Indigenous groups demand autonomy while others do not? If not autonomy, what demands do Indigenous groups make, and when? And finally, what are the material and non-material stakes of (not) demanding autonomy?

To understand why Indigenous groups make the demands they do, I explore their preferences over different institutional arrangements, of which autonomy is just one type. *Autonomy* recognizes Indigenous cultural identities *and* the legitimacy of long-standing Indigenous institutions (e.g., communal landholding, traditional political authorities). Other outcomes recognize only

2. There is, however, debate over the extent to which Indigenous municipalities had agency over these decisions (Benton 2017; Díaz-Cayeros et al. 2014; Recondo 2007).

one or neither of these. *Assimilation* rejects Indigenous cultural identities and institutions in favor of those embraced by a politically or economically dominant non-Indigenous group. *Integration* recognizes Indigenous cultural identities only within the framework of non-Indigenous, state-sanctioned institutions (e.g., affirmative action programs, electoral quotas). Indigenous groups' preferences over these different outcomes reflect both material considerations (an evaluation of which is expected to most benefit group welfare) and non-material ones (e.g., psychological attachments to specific group identities).

In this book, I argue that historical instances of extraction—particularly those that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century—profoundly shaped contemporary evaluations of the material and non-material benefits of autonomy. During this pivotal (though frequently understudied) period, Indigenous groups developed novel ways to resist political and economic elites' efforts to seize their labor and land. In some cases, resistance occurred through traditional, ethnic leaders, leading to both enduring investments in Indigenous institutions and, ultimately, demands for autonomy. In others, unions and left parties played a more central role in organizing resistance, reducing investments in Indigenous institutions and sparking long-term demands for integration or assimilation.

The primary empirical focus is Latin America, a region in which a growing number of nation-states have enshrined Indigenous rights in constitutions and statutory laws. Yet, as I discussed above, these policy changes have been unevenly embraced at the subnational level; neighboring Indigenous communal or kinship groups (*communities*) frequently take fundamentally different approaches to autonomy. This subnational variation has implications for other key outcomes of Indigenous politics. For instance, divergence in community demands may complicate large-scale Indigenous collective action (e.g., national movements), which generally requires a common interest or grievance (Olson 1971, 7–8; Yashar 2005). Many existing studies of Indigenous politics employ a supply-side approach to explore these decisions of national governments to recognize autonomy.³ The book's *demand-side* approach endeavors to explain this community-level variation, serving as a needed complement to supply-side accounts. Specifically, it sheds valuable

3. Holzinger et al. (2019) provides a notable exception, endeavoring to understand *cross-national* variation in Indigenous demands for autonomy. This book aims to understand *subnational* variation in demand-making.

light on whether autonomy is adopted *on paper* and on whether it is implemented at the local level.

The theory developed in this book also speaks to broader debates in the comparative politics literature. Scholars of civil conflict and nationalism, for example, often seek to explain why groups pursue autonomy. Research in this tradition highlights the primacy of economic motivations but disagrees over whether wealth and privilege (Sambanis and Milanovic 2014; Treisman 1997) or poverty and marginalization (Hechter 2000; Horowitz 1985) best explain demands for territorial authority. This book moves beyond a primary concern with contemporary economic motivations to explain autonomy demands as the product of *historical patterns of mobilization*.⁴ Those groups that mobilized along ethnic lines in the past have been more likely to demand autonomy today, while those that mobilized along non-ethnic lines have—for material and non-material reasons—largely avoided making autonomy demands.⁵

1.1 What Is Autonomy, and Why Do Groups Want It?

Autonomy has enormous potential to shape key outcomes of interest to social scientists and politicians. The language of autonomy often motivates rebel actors in ethnic conflicts. Debates over autonomy have constituted a key barrier to the ratification of constitutions in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Chile, among others. Proponents of autonomy highlight its potential to improve natural resource management, environmental stability, democratic responsiveness, and the inclusion of historically marginalized groups. However, the precise meaning of the word is often unclear.

I define autonomy as a territorial right to local self-rule exercised within (and under) the jurisdiction of an existing nation-state. Because it involves a territory, autonomy cannot be claimed by all groups; instead, the group claiming autonomy must be “territorially concentrated,” such as the Kurds in Iraq or the Quebecois in Canada, possessing a contiguous, physical space within and over which authority can be exercised (Hechter 2000, 14).

4. The relative economic condition of Indigenous groups may interact with historic collective action capacity—an idea I return to in the conclusion.

5. Treisman (1997) notes the importance of cultural and ethnic identities as a “resource” for leaders demanding autonomy (248). The loss of such identities reduces the likelihood that these demands are successful.

Autonomy may be *economic*, involving the recognition of customary landholding institutions (i.e., communal land), or *political*, arising from state recognition of traditional leaders and governance institutions. The latter transfers authority to ethnic leaders, while the former implicitly recognizes the authority of these leaders, whose power to manage and mediate access to collectively held land gives them substantial control over community members. The domains over which authority extends—and the degree of state intervention—vary by context. In theory, however, the policy responsibilities of autonomous, ethnic governments should correspond to those traditionally exercised by local state institutions, and the state should have a relatively limited capacity to preempt autonomous governments. As such, autonomy implies transferring meaningful responsibilities from state officials to leaders of historically marginalized ethnic groups, which may entail creating new procedures for distributive decision-making and policy implementation. This devolution of power could result in either concentrated authority in the figure of a local executive (e.g., a chief) or deliberative and direct democracy through village or tribal assemblies. The latter has been more common in Latin America (Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2016; Magaloni et al. 2019), while the former is more common in Sub-Saharan Africa (Baldwin 2015).

Because autonomy is exercised *within* existing nation-states, the authority it confers is often substantially less than sovereignty, self-determination, or secession. Why, then, do groups demand autonomy over more extreme institutional changes? Hechter (2000, 116) captures this puzzle by asking, “If self-determination is universally valued, why do people ever settle for anything less?” The available empirical evidence, for example, suggests that some ethnic groups reject autonomy *not* because they oppose increased authority, but rather because the notion of autonomy does not adequately articulate the amount of authority they desire. Gurr (1994) argues that the Kurds in Iraq and Tamils in Sri Lanka rejected autonomy settlements that were imposed unilaterally by the government in the wake of civil wars in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively, demanding secession instead (366).⁶ Leaders of Bolivian Indigenous municipalities that have started and subsequently abandoned the autonomy process have frequently cited government interference that precludes the meaningful exercise of authority; they lament that “requirements are imposed

6. Horowitz (1981) maintains that the Kurds did not seek secession and independence (169).

on us under the criteria of some bureaucrat, who does not know the reality of Indigenous peoples.”⁷

Despite these costs, many ethnic groups embrace autonomy—even as a more limited form of authority—for two reasons. First, it is difficult to achieve, but more expansive forms of authority may be impossible. Rothschild (1981) argues that governments are often unwilling to recognize even minimal levels of autonomy because “they fear that ‘the appetite grows while eating’” (152). Therefore, ethnic groups may prefer to lobby for autonomy because it is the most radically transformative demand they can plausibly achieve. Like governments, they may also believe autonomy is a necessary step to obtain more expansive forms of authority. The second reason many ethnic groups seek autonomy is that it preserves access to existing benefits of belonging to a larger governing unit, which provides “collective goods . . . [that] are subject to economies of scale that reduce their cost. . . . Members of peripheral nations may be willing to sacrifice some self-determination to profit from inclusion in a larger, albeit multinational, state” (Hechter 2000, 116–117). Therefore, autonomy might occupy a comfortable middle ground between the privileges of belonging to a nation-state and the benefits of self-governance over local affairs.

In most of the cases discussed in this book, Indigenous groups did not reject autonomy because they wanted sovereignty or independence, but because they viewed autonomy as *too* expansive and saw non-state—perhaps traditional—institutions as a barrier to their inclusion within existing nation-states. Comanche leader Robert Coffey neatly summarized this perspective. In debates over the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act in the United States, he argued against recognizing tribal institutions, asserting, “we protest against the change of the laws . . . and the taking away of individual and property rights guaranteed by treaties and acts of Congress. . . . We feel that segregation which seems the intent of the bill would be a backward step for us” (quoted in Deloria 2002, 291).

This book focuses on Indigenous groups’ three main demand-making strategies (depicted in Figure 1.1).⁸ The first is assimilation, which entails sacrificing ethnic institutions and subordinating cultures to the economically and politically dominant group; Indigenous *individuals* are given the same

7. See Agencia de Noticias Fides (2022, September 23). Author translation.

8. See Rothschild (1981, 150–152).

1.1. WHAT IS AUTONOMY, AND WHY DO GROUPS WANT IT? 7

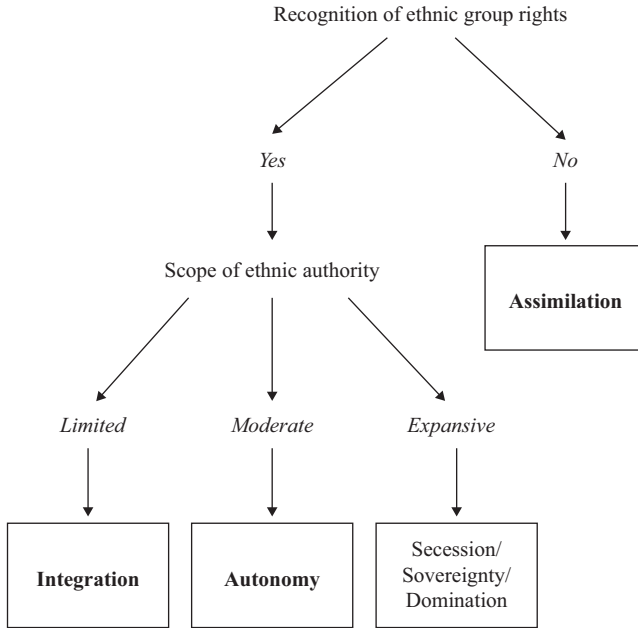


FIGURE 1.1. Typology of demands of ethnic leaders

Note: The book's three main outcomes of interest are displayed in bold.

Demands reflect preferences for leaders of *territorially concentrated* ethnic groups.

rights as non-Indigenous individuals in an effort to reduce the salience of ethnic difference.⁹ Examples include providing education only in a colonial language (e.g., Spanish, Portuguese, English) and imposing private property at the expense of traditional patterns of collective landholding. The second strategy is integration, which allows group “members to rise socially and politically and to extend their economic activities as individuals without impairing the group’s ethnic vitality” (Rothschild 1981, 151). Integration policies (e.g., electoral quotas, affirmative action programs, pluricultural constitutions) give ethnic groups authority over cultural matters and guarantee their representation in states and markets. As such, they recognize Indigenous identities but not Indigenous institutions. The third strategy is autonomy, which recognizes

9. As I discuss below, while these are individual rights, they often are obtained through collective, class-based mobilization.

Indigenous identities *and* institutions.¹⁰ The next section develops my argument to explain variation in these three principle outcomes of interest.

1.2 Argument

To explain why Indigenous communities demand autonomy in the contemporary period, it is necessary to look to the past. Historical factors such as colonial-era extraction have shaped Indigenous groups' present-day economic welfare (Acemoglu et al. 2001; Dell 2010; Guardado 2018; Lee and Schultz 2012; Mahoney 2010). It stands to reason that variation in other, understudied social and political outcomes, including collective mobilization for autonomy, might also be rooted in these historical experiences.¹¹

This book advances two deeply related historical arguments. The first is that colonial and post-independence Indigenous-state relations, which were often characterized by land and labor extraction, inspired Indigenous peoples to invest in collective mobilization to resist exploitation. The second argument is that the form this collective action took shaped later demands for autonomy. State-led extraction often motivated Indigenous communities to invest in *ethnic* identities and institutions, which over time triggered demands for autonomy to protect these same identities and institutions.¹² Extraction by rural elites at the turn of the twentieth century more often led to investments in *class*-based institutions (e.g., unions and left parties) that mobilized resistance to rural elites. These organizations frequently deemphasized or even openly opposed autonomy and instead privileged demands for assimilation or integration.

10. The book does not analyze the more radical strategies of secession and domination (wresting control of the state from the dominant ethnic group) because these have only rarely been embraced in the contemporary period (see Chapter 2). Groups that do not make demands, such as those that have very little contact with the state, and thus enjoy *de facto* autonomy (Yashar 2005), are likewise beyond the scope of this study. Given the expanded reach of the state in recent decades, the decision to discard this outcome eliminates only a small number of communities from the analysis.

11. This work joins a growing body of scholarship examining these questions (see also Mundim 2022). The important role that memory plays in Indigenous communities further highlights how historical experiences may shape key outcomes for native groups (Abercrombie 1998; Medrano 2011).

12. See, e.g., Honig (2022) on the ways that strong customary institutions can encourage communities to seek state recognition.

While extraction has often inspired short-term resistance, historical factors have shaped whether the effects of this resistance have endured. This book explains the impact of extraction at the beginning of the twentieth century, a period of increased popular sector mobilization through *organizations*. Unions arose to organize Indigenous peoples along class lines, and understudied yet important Indigenous organizations emerged to mobilize communities along ethnic lines. The concessions these groups achieved and the organizational infrastructure they provided created path-dependent forms of mobilization that have often endured into the present. Before the twentieth century, such organizations were absent, and, as such, extraction had more fleeting effects on demand-making.

1.2.1 *The Divergent Effects of Extraction*

Latin American governments have often refused to protect Indigenous institutions due to an overriding interest in extraction—the temporary or permanent capture of Indigenous groups’ land, labor, or natural and financial wealth by non-Indigenous actors, usually rural elites (e.g., landowners, mining companies, land developers) or the state (which can be predatory, developmentalist, or liberal). Examples include discriminatory head taxes or tributes levied only on Indigenous communities in the colonial and post-independence periods; various policies in the late nineteenth century that privatized Indigenous communal land for the benefit of non-Indigenous landlords; and contemporary efforts by states to seize valuable Indigenous land and natural resources. The numerous instances of labor coercion were perhaps the most common and harmful.

This book focuses on particularly pivotal instances of extraction that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century. Landowners and the central state competed for access to scarce Indigenous labor. The state, for its part, forced members of Indigenous communities—and frequently Indigenous communities alone—to work without pay to build roads and railways, deliver the mail, and serve in the military, all to project state power. Rural elites sought access to the same labor supply, seeking to trap Indigenous workers in debt peonage arrangements on large estates to take advantage of booming internal and international markets. In the domain of Indigenous labor, the interests of political and economic elites were fundamentally misaligned.

I argue that this extractive competition over Indigenous labor—and, more importantly, Indigenous communities’ response to it—shaped long-term

community demands for autonomy. The *level* of extraction affected communities' later collective mobilization capacity, while the *type* of extraction determined which rights they demanded. High levels of extraction generally involved exploitation and abuse, sometimes enough to destroy and demobilize communities.¹³ More often, however, this extraction triggered resistance from communities and enduring patterns of collective mobilization that persisted through three mechanisms. First, resistance led affected groups to seek organizational allies—such as left parties, labor unions, or Indigenous organizations—that could defend the community against abuses by the state or landowners. These ties to established organizations endured well beyond the period of extraction. Second, the collective memory of exploitation created a shared grievance and potential threat around which social leaders (e.g., Indigenous community leaders, union officials) could mobilize communities in the future. Third, extraction redefined community members' ties to existing Indigenous identities and institutions.

The type of labor extraction that communities experienced is instrumental for understanding the conditions under which this collective mobilization was deployed to demand autonomy. *State-led extraction* played a significant role in eroding community trust in the government, prompting Indigenous communities to turn inward—toward their ethnic identities and institutions—to resist extraction.¹⁴ These investments in ethnic patterns of mobilization and in Indigenous institutions and identities endured through supra-communal ethnic organizations and collective memory, ultimately promoting claims for autonomy—i.e., the recognition and protection of Indigenous identities and institutions.

Rural elite extraction generally undermined demands for autonomy. Rural elites (e.g., large landowners) often sought to weaken Indigenous institutions and identities by dividing communal land into private plots, creating privately held debt, and co-opting long-standing Indigenous leaders.¹⁵ The erosion of

13. El Salvador's extensive use of repression to enforce coercive labor arrangements discouraged peasant communities from resisting (Wood 2003, 24).

14. State-led extractive efforts historically sought to incorporate Indigenous elites (Dell 2010; Platt 1982). Yet, following independence, as nation-states grew stronger and sought to deploy their authority in traditionally peripheral areas, they began to engage in more direct forms of labor extraction that effectively circumvented Indigenous elites.

15. In contrast to the state, landowners at the turn of the twentieth century were generally less preoccupied with establishing territorial control and more interested in expanding their wealth at the lowest possible cost. As such, these rural elites were more likely to pursue collaboration

Indigenous institutions reduced the need to demand protections for them through autonomy. This form of extraction was also less corrosive to Indigenous communities' trust in the government and thus increased the viability of demands for integration or assimilation. Rural sector unions and left parties, which emerged at the turn of the twentieth century and were especially active in organizing on large estates, reinforced these preferences for integration or assimilation rather than autonomy; they viewed ethnic identities and institutions as a barrier to organizing a peasant-worker alliance.

Whether rural elite extraction generated demands for integration or assimilation depended on whether groups had also been subject to state-led extraction. Communities that experienced state-led extraction made investments in Indigenous identities and institutions and were, therefore, more skeptical of assimilation. In these cases, labor unions and left parties adopted a hybrid strategy that incorporated selective ethnic appeals to recruit and secure the continued buy-in of Indigenous communities. This involved displaying Indigenous symbols in union halls, using Indigenous languages in meetings, and placing ethnic leaders in positions of organizational leadership. Unions and left parties, however, generally refused to challenge the supremacy of state institutions, within which demands for higher wages and better working conditions were articulated. Communities that experienced both state-led and rural elite extraction were, therefore, more likely to demand integration, which recognized Indigenous identities *within existing state institutions* (e.g., affirmative action, electoral quotas).

Demands for assimilation were more common among groups that experienced only rural elite extraction. Groups that did not experience state-led extraction had weaker Indigenous institutions and leaders and were more receptive to organizational allies that emphasized and materially rewarded assimilation. Mobilization along exclusively class-based lines, especially in the twentieth century, yielded benefits from landowners (e.g., higher wages) and governments (e.g., land reform). These successes discouraged groups from investing in Indigenous identities and institutions, which, once lost, could not be easily recovered.

Groups that experienced neither type of extraction have generally preferred autonomy, an assumption I elaborate on in Chapter 3. Yet, because

with Indigenous elites to capture Indigenous labor. Owners of large estates frequently offered Indigenous leaders better quality land, exemption from labor obligations, and cash payment in exchange for access to Indigenous workers.

TABLE 1.1. Theoretical predictions

		State-led extraction	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Rural elite extraction	<i>Low</i>	Limited collective mobilization Demand: No formal demand	Collective mobilization for ethnic identities and ethnic institutions Demand: Autonomy
	<i>High</i>	Collective mobilization for neither ethnic identities nor ethnic institutions Demand: Assimilation	Collective mobilization for ethnic identities but not ethnic institutions Demand: Integration

they have faced no active threat to their territorial integrity or labor, they find it unnecessary to mobilize on behalf of autonomy; only if they experienced extraction (which would shift them to another cell within Figure 1.1) would they need to make demands. Because these cases do not generate active demands, they constitute a limited theoretical focus of this book. They are also empirically rare: the substantial demand for Indigenous labor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant that most communities experienced some form of labor extraction unless they were too inaccessible.

To summarize, Indigenous communities that experienced state-led extraction have been more likely to demand autonomy, while those exposed to rural elite extraction have been more likely to demand assimilation. Communities that experienced both forms of extraction have typically demanded integration. Communities exposed to neither type of extraction have been more likely to prefer autonomy but generally have not mobilized to demand it. Table 1.1 outlines my central theoretical predictions.

1.3 Alternative Explanations

Two key alternative theoretical frameworks might explain subnational variation in Indigenous demands for autonomy.¹⁶ The first is what I label a

16. Cross-national variation in Indigenous mobilization for autonomy has a further set of explanations. As discussed above, large-scale Indigenous movements that have emerged

distributive approach, which argues that autonomy demands arise within groups that are “perpetual losers in the competition for state-provided goods” (Hechter 2000, 133). In other words, autonomy solves an inequitable distribution of resources among groups and regions. A long line of scholarship on secession, for example, has argued that

the modern, mobilizing state’s redistributive performance is often either inefficient or perceived as bias, or both, [and] certain categories of citizens and subjects are likely to be alienated from it. If these alienated categories regard and organize themselves as ethnic groups, and if their discontent is sufficiently deep and systemic, they may challenge the very structure or boundaries and domains of their current state. (Rothschild 1981, 233)

Studies of regional (rather than group) wealth also highlight that opposition to the current distribution of resources sparks autonomy demands: for groups from resource-rich regions, the costs of autonomy are lower and the benefits higher (Sambanis and Milanovic 2014; Treisman 1997; Wallerstein 2005, 88).¹⁷ My theory does not dispute that materialist motivations can explain autonomy demands.¹⁸ However, existing distributive accounts cannot explain why groups demand autonomy over other equalizing or redistributive demands. For example, economically disadvantaged ethnic groups will likely be dissatisfied with how the government distributes resources. If autonomy were the only solution to this inequality, disadvantaged groups would be more likely to support autonomy. Yet, in practice, the choice set is more complex. These groups may choose to embrace long-standing ethnic institutions, or they may judge that the best alternative is to invest in integration or assimilation. Extant theories of distributive

in recent decades have often been credited with effectively articulating Indigenous demands for autonomy at the national level (Jackson and Warren 2005; Yashar 1998). Scholars have highlighted the role of pluricultural constitutions and peace agreements in providing the opportunity space within which Indigenous communities can mobilize to demand state recognition of rights, including autonomy (Van Cott 2001). Others note the importance of ethnic fractionalization, socioeconomic development, and colonial histories (Holzinger et al. 2019).

17. See also Gourevitch (1979).

18. Scholars have noted, however, that regional resource wealth does not constitute a key rationale for autonomy demands; as Tockman and Cameron (2014) observe, “natural resource control is not a critical issue in many indigenous struggles for autonomy” (63).

politics do not help adjudicate among these options, a key gap my theory seeks to fill.¹⁹

A second alternative theoretical approach to the study of autonomy emphasizes the importance of sociocultural issues. Scholars in this tradition emphasize that economic and material motivations are “rarely decisive” in explaining demands for territorial authority (Horowitz 1981, 177). Instead, groups advocate autonomy due to a desire for prestige, honor, or control of a “homeland,” or due to anxiety about the loss of cultural and symbolic forms of ethnic representation (Hannum 1996, 463, Hartle and Bird 1971; Horowitz 1981). Smith (1985), for example, observes, “it is a sense of discrimination within the larger community that so often forces minority cultural and ethnic groups to seek autonomy” (3).²⁰ This work generally presumes that groups that are territorially cohesive and share a history of cultural and social marginalization should uniformly demand autonomy.²¹ The absence of autonomy demands may thus indicate a lack of group cohesion, identity, or shared history of discrimination.²² Yet, the examples in this book will show that cohesive, territorially based ethnic groups do not always behave in this way. Their demands—and the degree to which these demands reflect ethnic as opposed to other identity concerns—instead emerge from their response to patterns of extraction.

Thus, existing theories generally fail to make key distinctions relevant to the outcomes studied in this book. Sociocultural and distributive theories are well equipped to address one strategy by which ethnic groups can achieve their material and non-material aims: autonomy. However, these theories do not adequately explain why autonomy is pursued instead of other potential responses to discrimination and inequality, which include integration and

19. Specifically, I consider dissatisfaction with the status quo—particularly economic disadvantage—a key scope condition of my argument. Demands arise from a desire to change extant institutions; yet, to understand the form those demands take, it is important to examine historical instances of extraction.

20. This echoes the work of Lawrence (2013), who argues that demands for independence from colonial rule in Sub-Saharan Africa arose only when demands for equality and meaningful inclusion failed.

21. A potential exception to this arises from structural factors such as the distribution of minority and majority populations within a given region (Hartle and Bird 1971; Horowitz 1981; Sorens 2012).

22. This is especially true for scholars who advocate a primordialist conception of ethnicity, which assumes that “groups seek to maintain the integrity and autonomy of the group” (Yashar 2005, 11).

assimilation. They also fail to consider the dynamism of community preferences. Preferences for autonomy are not fixed, as the above theories implicitly suggest. Instead, they vary over time; initial preferences for autonomy can evolve into demands for assimilation and integration, and vice versa. Thus, a new theoretical approach is needed.

1.4 Case Selection and Empirical Approach

The book's explanatory focus is on extractive labor institutions that were common at the turn of the twentieth century. In addition to the unprecedented intensity of coercive labor practices, national and regional popular sector organizations first appeared during this period. These included labor unions, left parties, and even early Indigenous movements. For example, Indigenous Mapuche organizations, such as the Caupolicán Society and the Araucanian Federation, emerged in Chile in the 1920s. These organizations wielded considerable influence and lobbied governments to recognize Indigenous cultural rights and native groups' access to communal lands (Crow 2010; Foerster and Montecino Aguirre 1988). In that same decade, Indigenous leaders in Peru formed the Tahuantinsuyo Pro-Indigenous Rights Committee with dozens of subcommittees spread throughout the country. In Bolivia, the Oldest Autonomous Mayors formed in the first decades of the twentieth century and played an important role in increasing the salience of the Aymara Indigenous identity. These Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations constitute the primary mechanism through which the posited effects arise and endure. As a result, it is unlikely that effects from earlier periods of extraction (e.g., the more extensively studied colonial period) would have persisted to the same degree.

I examine the effects of this extraction on Indigenous groups' demands in two emblematic Latin American cases. Peru and Bolivia have large Indigenous populations, and at the turn of the twentieth century, rural elite and state-led extraction were commonplace. Landowners seized Indigenous land, capturing Indigenous workers in debt peonage arrangements to toil on large estates. In each case, governments also used unpaid Indigenous labor to build roads and railways, and for other infrastructure projects. Yet, exposure to these different forms of labor extraction varied considerably within the two countries. In the Bolivian department of Cochabamba, for example, Indigenous groups experienced relatively little state-led extraction but high levels of

rural elite extraction. The reverse was true in the northern region of Bolivia's Potosí department, where hacienda (large estate) expansion was relatively limited, but many Indigenous laborers were conscripted for state infrastructure projects. Similar variation can be observed within the Peruvian department of Cusco. The provinces of La Convención, Paruro, and Paucartambo followed a path similar to Cochabamba's, while the provinces of Quispicanchi, Canas, and Canchis more closely paralleled northern Potosí. Many other regions in these two countries experienced both forms of extraction, including La Paz, Oruro, and Southern Potosí in Bolivia, as well as the capital of Peru's Cusco department.

Within these two cases, I analyze autonomy demands primarily at the level of the Indigenous community.²³ The term "community," which is common in the literature on Indigenous and peasant groups in the Americas,²⁴ refers to any membership-based unit that is territorially delineated and comprised of individuals who either consider themselves Indigenous or maintain long-standing practices, languages, or institutions that could be considered Indigenous.²⁵ Members of a community define its borders, often according to long-standing kinship ties, and these boundaries may or may not correspond to administrative units recognized by governments (e.g., municipalities, reserves, reservations, communes). A country often contains hundreds or even thousands of Indigenous communities. Figure 1.2 maps the numerous documented Indigenous communities in Latin America.²⁶

My population of interest includes Indigenous communities that existed at the end of the nineteenth century, as identified through census records. This means that communities that are currently labeled as "peasant communities" fall into the category of "Indigenous" for the purposes of this book. I do this for two reasons. First, selecting only those communities that currently identify as Indigenous would eliminate a key collection of communities that are of theoretical interest to this study: those that previously identified as Indigenous but

23. Where necessary, due to data limitations, I conduct analyses among larger subnational units.

24. See, e.g., Wolf (1957).

25. Because institutions and cultural practice can change—especially in response to rights that are demanded and received—an Indigenous community in an earlier historical period may no longer be considered an Indigenous community today.

26. This book aims to join a small but growing body of work that focuses on outcomes at the level of the Indigenous community (e.g., Fontana 2022).



FIGURE 1.2. Documented Indigenous communities in Latin America
Source: Author's map based on data from Dubertret and Alden Wily (2015).

no longer do. Second, even communities that identify as “peasant” have often preserved Indigenous institutions and customs.

Using the community as my unit of analysis presents a necessary analytic shift. Prior research often highlights the importance of large-scale Indigenous movements for the emergence of autonomy.²⁷ The Peruvian case, however, demonstrates the need for an addendum to this existing work. Although it was the heart of the Inca empire and is home to a comparatively large Indigenous population, Peru's *national-level* Indigenous movements have only limited

27. See, e.g., Andolina (2003); Evans (2011); Jackson and Warren (2005); Yashar (2005).

influence in shaping national-level policy.²⁸ Yet, Indigenous *communities* in Peru have achieved important and often overlooked concessions. Over 70 percent of the country's Indigenous and peasant communities have communal land titles. A third to half of Indigenous children receive public education in an Indigenous language. And the government has recognized nearly 90 percent of Indigenous communities. That small-scale Indigenous communities—of which there are about 6,000 in Peru—have been the primary level at which Indigenous autonomy has been recognized suggests a need for a renewed focus on these units. I argue that such communities are often equally (if not more) consequential than large-scale movements for achieving Indigenous autonomy.

Identifying *community* demands presents a methodological challenge. While differences may arise across communities, there may also be disagreement within communities around which demands to prioritize. To address this challenge, I rely on behavioral measures that best reflect community demands for autonomy. Costly actions to obtain (or, in some cases, reject) autonomy involve the consent of most community members. For example, a community's decision to apply for a collective land title or political autonomy requires a substantial investment of various members' time and resources. Often, the community must provide documentation to—and engage in prolonged negotiations with—the central government. The community, rather than a single individual, generally pays for hiring lawyers, translators, and enumerators. Examining community-level behavior thus provides valuable insight into community demands for autonomy.

Yet, as I discuss above, examining autonomy provides only a part of the story; evaluating the incidence of non-autonomy demands is also important. To do this, I examine manifestos and organizational membership information for both peasant unions and “hybrid organizations,” which advocate assimilationist or integrationist demands, respectively. I also analyze Indigenous community members' preferences and behaviors using original and existing surveys.

The data collection effort for this project presented a substantial challenge, largely due to the aforementioned difficulties of defining measures of autonomy, assimilation, and integration and gathering data that reflects these measures well. I spent a total of eighteen months conducting fieldwork in Peru and Bolivia. This included over seventy interviews with Indigenous community

28. See, e.g., Yashar (1998); Landa Vásquez (2006); Montoya (2006); Albó (1999).

leaders, mayors, and bureaucratic officials in several regions of both countries; a survey of more than 300 Indigenous community leaders in Peru; a survey of more than 1,000 Indigenous Bolivians; and field visits to over thirty Indigenous communities in both countries. These strategies yielded critical insights into community-level demands for autonomy, integration, and assimilation. Extensive archival research provided information on the thousands of Indigenous and peasant organizations and movements in Bolivia and Peru, as did memoirs of Indigenous activists, newspaper reports, and government accounts. Finally, I compiled information from government records on autonomy applications and collective land titles; through a freedom of information request, I obtained community-level data on autonomy from a 2012 Peruvian census of Indigenous communities.

In addition to data challenges concerning the outcome variable, the independent variable—extraction—also presented difficulties. Few comprehensive sources reliably document historical experiences with different forms of extraction. I measure rural elite extraction in Bolivia by examining the change in the population residing in Indigenous communities between 1854 and 1900—data that was collected by McBride (1921) using tribute and taxation data from the nineteenth century and the 1900 Census; most of the community population decline during this period was attributable to large estate expansion. I also examine the prevalence of haciendas across subnational regions of Bolivia in 1950. I measure rural elite extraction in Peru by examining the change in the hacienda population using the 1876 and 1940 censuses.²⁹ Data on state-led extraction was even more challenging to obtain. The Peruvian government did not systematically collect data on labor conscription or lost it; today, this data exists for only a few provinces. To overcome this issue, I exploit the rules that President Augusto Leguía implemented in the 1920s to determine which communities would provide unpaid labor for road construction. This involved collecting data on road construction and each community's proximity to provinces where labor conscription occurred. For Bolivia, I gathered data on state-led extraction by examining provincial and departmental reports submitted to the national government in the early 1900s. I supplement this data using a strategy similar to that employed in Peru; I code labor conscription based on community location vis-à-vis a large-scale infrastructure project, which serves as a proxy for exposure to labor conscription (communities located closer to these projects should have been more likely to

29. No census was conducted in the intervening period.

be conscripted). These data sources provide a rich, nuanced, and novel picture of labor extraction at the turn of the twentieth century (see Table 1.2).

The most substantial challenge for the project was devising a strategy to reliably identify the effects of historical extraction. Governments and rural elites may have targeted extraction to communities based on baseline characteristics correlated with later mobilization and demand-making. To obviate this problem, I—where possible—leverage natural and survey experiments. This observational and experimental data provides an opportunity to overcome endogeneity issues that would otherwise plague this study of historical legacies. Where I cannot use causal inference techniques to evaluate crucial parts of my theory, I rely on a combination of correlational analyses and process tracing.

Within-country comparisons allow for a test of the general theory I develop in Table 1.1, but my theory can also explain important cross-national differences between Peru and Bolivia. While assimilation has been common in both countries, demands for autonomy have been, perhaps surprisingly, more common in Peru, while demands for integration have been predominant in Bolivia. As I elaborate further in subsequent chapters, these differences can largely be attributed to the timing of extraction (“extractive sequences”). Rural elite extraction happened in similar periods in both countries. However, in Bolivia, labor conscription was adopted in the 1890s, almost thirty years earlier than in Peru. As a result, in Peru, rural elite extraction—where it occurred—almost always happened before state-led extraction, leading to demands for either autonomy or assimilation. Conversely, many communities in Bolivia experienced state-led extraction before rural elite extraction, leading to demands for assimilation or integration.

1.5 Contributions

This book offers three key innovations vis-à-vis existing accounts of Indigenous and ethnic politics. First, it challenges an abiding assumption in the literature that autonomy is the central demand of Indigenous communities (Díaz-Polanco 1998). Often, inferences about “Indigenous” preferences are drawn from examinations of large-scale ethnic organizations and movements; yet, this approach ignores Indigenous peoples who may not feel represented by these organizations or by ethnic mobilization more broadly. Examining very local Indigenous communities, I demonstrate that there is, in

TABLE 1.2. Data sources used in the analysis

Extraction	Immediate patterns of mobilization	Long-term demands
<i>Peru</i>	<u>State-led extraction</u> - 1920s government reports on road building - Analysis of laws governing eligibility for conscription	- Official data on community recognition - 2012 Census of Indigenous communities - 2017 author survey of community presidents
	<u>Rural elite extraction</u> - Census data on expansion of large estates between 1876 and 1940	- Analysis of content/organizers of movement demands (1956–1964) - 2017 population census
	<u>State-led extraction</u> - Author compilation of reports issued by local prefects in 1900s/1910s - 1900s registries of conscripts - Location of railways and roads built in early 1900s - 2020 author survey	- Government data on municipalities that have pursued autonomy - Responses to the author’s 2020 survey - Petitions for land restitution in 1950s - Support for Katarista Party (1980s)
	<u>Rural elite extraction</u> - Change in Indigenous community population, 1854–1900 (McBride 1921) - 1950 Census - 2020 author survey	- Qualitative analysis of location of networks of “legal chiefs” (<i>caciques apoderados</i>) - Analysis of peasant movements (1946–1947)
<i>Bolivia</i>		

fact, considerable heterogeneity in the rights Indigenous groups want. This demand-side approach not only challenges a key assumption in the literature but also suggests that the prevailing focus on supply-side factors (e.g., neoliberalism, democracy's third wave, large-scale Indigenous movements) may be insufficient for explaining when Indigenous autonomy occurs.

Second and relatedly, my theory demonstrates the critical ways in which autonomy, assimilation, and integration are co-produced outcomes by state and society. Much prior work analyzes state policy toward Indigenous communities as a fully top-down endeavor.³⁰ Yet, these arguments assume a high level of state capacity, which is inconsistent with the observation that countries in the region have rarely been able to project power so fully into peripheral areas (Cárdenas 2010; O'Donnell 1993; Soifer 2015). As Yashar (2005) observes, even though states privilege specific identities, "they have been too weak to impose them" (7). Without a strong state, grassroots buy-in becomes essential for understanding where government policy is faithfully implemented. The demand-side approach of this book can explain why some Indigenous communities responded to state incentives to assimilate or integrate while others have sustained demands for autonomy.

Finally, the book provides a potentially important addendum to broader theories of ethnic politics, which often focus on *electoral* determinants of ethnic mobilization. Much of the existing scholarship argues that political entrepreneurs shape the incentives of groups to mobilize along ethnic lines (Bates 1983; Chandra 2004; Dunning and Harrison 2010; Horowitz 1985). This is particularly true during elections, when politicians seek to mobilize the identities that will deliver the most votes (Posner 2005). Elections can also activate more contentious and violent expressions of ethnic identity (Bates 1983, 61). Yet, given that most ethnic mobilization and demand-making for autonomy occur outside of electoral contexts, it is important to shift to the non-electoral sphere and explore the role of local, regional, and national organizations that constitute civil society.³¹ I argue that these organizations often play a more central role in shaping ethnic identities and demands than elected officials do. Furthermore, a focus only on the contemporary salience of ethnicity ignores important past events that determine political officials' choice sets.

30. Yashar (2005) makes a similar observation to the one I make here, arguing that twentieth-century policies that emphasized peasant identities "fostered the fiction that the state had turned Indians into peasants and stripped indigenous ethnicity of its salience" (61).

31. See, e.g., Mundim (2022).

Whether ethnicity is a viable identity to mobilize—i.e., whether enough voters identify with a given ethnic group—is a product of the historical formation and erosion of group identities (Yashar 2005, 12–13). Careful consideration of key historical moments in which ethnic, class, and other identities become salient can provide an important—and necessary—complement to existing electoral theories.

1.6 Outline of the Book

The remainder of the book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 establishes empirical variation in the primary outcome—demands for Indigenous autonomy, integration, and assimilation across Latin America. To measure Indigenous peoples' preferences, I compile historical and contemporary data and draw on information from original as well as existing surveys. I examine the cases of Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Bolivia. I demonstrate that while Indigenous peoples often want autonomy, they vary greatly in their desire to prioritize it over other costly demands, including assimilation and integration. Those who are wholly opposed to autonomy often cite the fear that their children will experience exclusion and discrimination.

Chapter 3 develops an argument to explain the variation in autonomy demands outlined in Chapter 2. It begins by situating the forms of extraction I analyze within a broader typology of colonial and post-independence extractive institutions in Latin America. I then present my argument: state-led extraction—often through labor conscription—triggered increased community investments in Indigenous institutions and ethnic patterns of mobilization. These near-term effects persisted, increasing the likelihood that communities would demand *autonomy*. Rural elite extraction more often undermined Indigenous institutions, leading native communities to seek alliances with class-based organizations, such as unions and left parties. These organizations represented communities' interests as peasant workers, increasing the likelihood of *assimilation*. Where both forms of extraction occurred together, Indigenous identities persisted but Indigenous institutions were subverted to class-based organizations—leading to demands for *integration*.

Chapter 4 outlines the post-independence history of state-led and rural elite extraction in Bolivia and Peru. It provides the first comprehensive effort to fully map variation in extractive experiences in both countries and documents when and where rural elite and state-led extraction were likely to

occur. It also explains *why* different forms of extraction happened where they did—ideas that are developed further in the empirical chapters that follow.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how experiencing only rural elite extraction promoted demands for *assimilation*. Using historical data and a careful analysis of the areas affected by hacienda growth, I show that peasant unions were most likely to emerge in Indigenous communities that had lost land to large estates. These unions then served to link Indigenous communities to left parties, including the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement in Bolivia and the military government in Peru, which advocated assimilation. I demonstrate that, today, communities affected by hacienda expansion assign less value to long-standing Indigenous institutions and are less likely to belong to Indigenous communities and organizations. Members of these communities are also less likely to identify as Indigenous.

Chapter 6 establishes that experiencing only state-led labor extraction increased demands for *autonomy*. Using process tracing and archival data, along with experimental and natural experimental evidence Bolivia and Peru, I demonstrate that government-organized conscription of Indigenous communities to build roads and railways triggered violent and nonviolent forms of ethnic resistance. Exposure to conscription also increased communities' membership in Indigenous organizations, reshaped Indigenous institutions, and created a collective memory of exploitation that sparked a long-term increase in community demands for autonomy.

Chapter 7 demonstrates that experiencing state-led *and* rural elite extraction increased long-term demands for *integration*. Using case studies, process tracing, electoral data, and a close analysis of historical Indigenous-peasant movements, the chapter sheds light on why peasant and Indigenous demands more often coexist in Bolivia than in Peru. The findings may also explain why Indigenous mobilization has been more likely to occur at the national level in Bolivia and the local level in Peru.

Chapter 8 summarizes the book's main findings and explores the potential scope conditions of the argument. To demonstrate both the empirical purchase and the limitations of my theory, I examine two cases beyond historical labor extraction: the 1930s-era Livestock Reduction Program of the US government and the contemporary seizure of Indigenous land in the Chapare region of Bolivia. I then turn to a discussion of how institutional and structural factors may condition the willingness of communities to express demands. I conclude by exploring the expected welfare effects of autonomy, with insights that should further refine our understanding of when communities pursue it.

The study of Indigenous autonomy is arguably more timely than ever. In recent decades, international organizations, such as the International Labor Organization and the United Nations, have issued guidelines that advocate greater autonomy for native populations. Governments have adopted frameworks for recognizing Indigenous rights from Nepal to the Central African Republic. Perhaps nowhere have conversations around Indigenous autonomy been more salient than in Latin America, where autonomy-expanding provisions have increasingly been enshrined in constitutions that recognize the plurinational or pluricultural nature of contemporary nation-states. Most scholarship on Indigenous rights in the region examines cross-national variation in governments' willingness to recognize autonomy.³² Yet, as autonomy comes to occupy an even more central place within Latin American politics, it becomes essential to understand when local-level Indigenous *communities* embrace it. This book thus moves beyond supply-side approaches to analyze subnational, demand-side variation in Indigenous autonomy.

32. This research focuses on the opportunity space provided by pluricultural constitutions and peace agreements (Van Cott 2001), the importance of strong, national-level Indigenous movements in lobbying for autonomy (Yashar 2005), the nature of the predominant political-economic ideology (e.g., neoliberalism, developmentalism), ethnic fractionalization and socioeconomic development (Holzinger et al. 2019), and the role of international organizations (Brysk 2000).

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