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# **How Political Engagement Helps Indigenous Communities in their Fight for Rights**

An honors thesis presented to the  
Department of Political Science,  
Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy,  
University at Albany, State University of New York  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in Political Science  
and  
graduation from the Honors College

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## **Abstract**

How does political engagement help indigenous communities in fighting for their rights? Indigenous communities have faced immense levels of oppression and discrimination throughout history. A growing global trend shows that more communities are fighting back and gaining their rights through political means. This paper looks at the multiple ways communities have mobilized, focusing specifically on non-violent, political methods of resistance. This is done by examining politically active indigenous populations from North, Central, and South America and the states that they reside in. Even though the Inuit, Mayan, and Quechua communities have faced similar discrimination, have the same goals, and reside in democratic countries; they have chosen different methods of political engagement. Through conducting a Most Similar Systems study, we hypothesize that the percent of population that an indigenous group makes up in a state is a determining factor in what political methods that group utilizes. By understanding the reasons behind this, it will become easier to study how political engagement helps indigenous communities in gaining a voice. Some methods could be more effective for different communities based on their population make up. Nevertheless, this study can provide insight into the functioning of indigenous political resistance systems and assist in putting together the larger picture of effective activism for these communities.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Introduction:**

Ethnic groups have long struggled in different nation-states to have their voices and opinions heard at the regional or national level. This increased difficulty is often due to the familiar feelings of discrimination and oppression against ethnic communities. Particularly, indigenous groups have felt this strain for much of their existence since colonialism. Victims of forced assimilation, eviction from their ancestral lands, widespread discrimination, and persecution since the contact period, these groups share a similar story across the American continents (Amnesty International, 2020). The pressures placed on these groups by the state often have the intention of marginalizing and othering the group in question, quieting their voice and existence. Despite these external pressures, many of the communities have continued to fight against the nation state they reside in, pushing for increased rights, equality, and reparations for past wrongs through political engagement. Ethnic indigenous groups have bonded together to protest and fight against different measures that the national government imposes on them. There have been many different measures of resistance, ranging from violent to peaceful.

This paper examines the different ways for how peaceful political engagement helps indigenous communities in gaining a voice. We hypothesize the percentage of indigenous peoples that make up a country is an important factor in how they politically engage with their nation and the world to make changes which benefit them. Through examining different cases, we can expect to learn more about how indigenous political engagement functions, groups motivations, and the agency used. These different cases succeed at giving indigenous communities a chance at representation and potentially a seat at the national level for their voices and needs.

This paper plans on examining different protest and resistance methodologies used throughout nations and indigenous groups and determines why that method was chosen. The nation-states of Guatemala, Peru, and Canada were chosen for this research. These states all have active indigenous populations who have a history of marginalization and government repression in their home. The groups in these states are the Mayans of Guatemala, the Quechua of Highland Peru, and the Inuit of Northern Canada.

In order to study the trends in protest and resistance methodologies, a Most Similar System design (MSS) of analysis will be conducted to explain why the percentage of the group in a country's population matters in how the group chooses to act. This study is a qualitative research method which will directly compare countries and groups that have similar situations but have different outcomes. In the case of this study, the countries and groups have significant similarities, from circumstance, government type of the state, and group status, yet they all attempt different resistance methodologies which are effective for them. By applying MSS, one will be able to visualize the different outcomes of the similarly situated indigenous groups. This paper will also discuss why minority groups mobilize against their home states, what the point of political engagement is, and historical difficulties for indigenous communities regarding mobilization and political engagement. The non-violent mobilization methods of political participation examined are the construction of political parties, voting, and international appeals.

**Contribution:**

Political engagement is an important element in the functioning of a cohesive society and is also an effective way of resisting oppression and implementing change when needed. Groups that have been pushed and dissuaded from utilizing this form of protest are left out of national

narratives, causing the group to lose trust for the state. While there is a good amount research about minority groups, marginalization, discrimination, its effects, and reactions to such; there is a gap when it comes to indigenous groups. They may have different situations, but by examining how these groups adopt methods for obtaining rights and voices, important implications can be drawn about activism and engagement. Focusing on only indigenous groups provides this study with a strength and unique perspective unlike other research regarding resistant methods. There are 370 million indigenous people worldwide, spread across 90 countries (The World Bank, 2019). Indigenous groups have commonalities between them and an extra layer of shared experience, especially when only considering indigenous groups in the Americas. They are also more likely to suffer from extreme poverty and face more challenges than other groups in countries with populations of indigenous and minority groups (Amnesty International, 2020). By examining solely these groups, a more cohesive study is created with meaningful implications to indigenous groups particularly.

## **Literature Review**

### ***I. Why Do People Protest and Mobilize?***

Political theorists have attempted to explain rebellion, protest, and activism for years and have often come to various conclusions. In order to understand why groups will fight against the political institutions that oversee them, it's essential to analyze their motivations. Ted Gurr has remained an authority on political conflict, arguing several explanations for rebellion in his works. In his book, *Why Men Rebel*, he names several reasonings for rebellion. They are popular discontent (relative deprivation), the justification or belief about the utility of political action, and the balance between discontented people's capacity to act vs. the government's capacity to

repress (Gurr, 1970). In this theory, the balance between all three criteria must be in the discontented group's favor for action to occur. Gurr later expanded his previous theory by examining specifically why minorities rebel. This narrowed focus examines the specific grievances minority groups have and gives cause to the types of discrimination they face that would drive a movement. He has found threats to cultural identity, inequality, and a historical loss of autonomy are all prominent grievances by these groups (Gurr, 1993).

Indigenous groups often have the types of grievances that Gurr talks about in *Why Minorities Rebel*. Through the marginalization and discrimination faced, they are often pushed to feel like 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens or worse in the countries that were once theirs. Carothers and Youngs (2015) talk about local triggers such as economic concerns and political decisions as a primary reason for protest and mobilization. Many times, the decisions that governments make affect native economy and political life, whether it be through limiting their way of subsistence, or making decisions regarding the autonomy and self-determination of the indigenous group without consultation. Stetson (2012) talks about how the use of natural resources in native territory is a large area of conflict between groups and the federal governments. This stands as an easy way for governments to exploit resources and make easy profit. Yet, the fact remains that environmental exploitation is most detrimental to indigenous groups who heavily rely on it for a living (Forgerson, 2015). This is a trend across the world, with state interest surpassing indigenous rights to their land. Other common grievances faced by native populations are suppressed rights, making it difficult to navigate the political realm, forced assimilation and repression of cultural beliefs and heritage, and lack of autonomy. These circumstances build upon Ted Gurr's claims about minority group grievances. Indigenous groups historically face

threats to cultural identity, inequality, and a historical loss of autonomy. These could easily lead to mobilization.

How is it possible for groups that exist in the same national borders of other citizens to get such different treatment and experiences in the country? The concept of othering seems to be a relatively common part of human activity. This idea of one group acting as superior or better leads to group mentalities that push away one portion of the population who are seen as different or lesser. Marginalized groups do not conform to the dominant norm and are thus marked as deviant or other (Young, 1990). These psychological boundaries that are formed tend to have real life oppressive consequences when it causes groups to have different experiences than the original group. The marginalized groups receive fewer public goods than the dominant group. This can create an attitude of relative deprivation, leading to future conflict (Winter-Levy and Lalwani, 2018). In addition, the dominant group will not fully realize their advantage and internalize a lesser value for the marginalized group (Young, 1990). These complicated aspects make functioning in a society with multiple groups extremely difficult.

Some scholars view nationalism as part of the problem here. Young (1990), saw this as detrimental to bringing together different groups. She discussed the probability of nationalism as causing othering. In her view, it had no benefits, seeing it as “externally exclusionary and internally oppressive” (Young, 1990). This ties in with the idea that nationalism is said to enhance people building by using othering as a tool to create a national group and unite a common people. With group autonomy being the most important factor in nationalism, it means a certain sect will get pushed away and ostracized (Young, 1990). In contrast to Young’s views, Herr states that nationalism can assist these groups that would be “othered”. Nationalism becomes essential to creating a world or a nation with “politics of difference” (Herr, 2008). In

redefining nationalism as polycentric, Herr makes the argument that nationalism can be beneficial and prevent othering when used correctly. These differing views of the value of nationalism will highlight the struggles that indigenous nations face as they are fighting against the national narrative.

Types of discrimination like othering and marginalization are familiar across ethnic groups. Studies show the impact of discrimination on groups. Even in situations where discrimination does not impede on an individual's livelihood, ethnic discrimination can still affect their physical wellbeing and mental health with high levels of stress (Contrada et al., 2000; Williams et al., 2003). Stress levels can impede functioning, happiness, and ability to make a living. This could lead to severe implications for an individual and their place in society. Sorens (2010) conducted a study utilizing the Minorities at Risk dataset and adding to it to make it more comprehensive (adding ethnic groups that did not have a political organization supporting them). In his research, he tested several independent variables against the level of political and economic discrimination that these ethnic groups faced. His results stated that central and regional governmental institutions, economic conditions, and minority group characteristics influence the level of discrimination that ethnic groups face (Sorens, 2010). Additionally, long term discrimination has had the effects of political and economic isolation for the groups affected (Wang, 2006). This has been documented for the Maya in Guatemala. Increased discrimination would make groups more likely to rebel in some way according to studies by Gurr and others.

A study by Berri and Saad (2014) looks at political participation of minority groups. The authors looked at how minority groups in Israel allow their political participation to be affected by the discrimination faced in the areas in which they reside (Berri & Saad, 2014). Findings indicated that local participation and engagement increased with low levels of equity and

decreased with higher levels of equity. This study shows that levels of discrimination affect the amount of political participation the group engages in. Groups that have faced historical to modern oppression and discrimination would be more likely to fight back in some form than groups who have more equitable conditions.

## ***II. Choosing Non-Violence:***

A lot goes into groups deciding whether they should take violent or non-violent measures if they decide to mobilize. This article will focus on non-violent means of political engagement. Some political scientists have focused their research on political violent outcomes of mobilization, whether that means insurgency, terrorism, rebellions, or warfare. While this type of mobilization has the potential to gain more attention than its non-violent counterparts, research demonstrates that violent protest movements can backfire (Simpson et al., 2018). While looking at violence from white nationalist groups and the anti-racial counter protestors, when the group in question was violent, they lost the public support. Additionally, public support for the group viewed as opposing the violent group rose (Simpson et al., 2018). Public opinion and support for a protest movement can prove to be extremely important, especially when the movement involves changing national trends and actions, as is often the case for indigenous groups who want increased rights, representation, and more.

## ***III. Why Choose Political Engagement?***

Scholars have long seen political participation and engagement essential to functioning in a country, and especially a democracy. Theorists like Alexis de Tocqueville viewed individuals engaging in the political sphere as the most important step in ensuring democratic steps in a state (De Tocqueville, 1838). Tocqueville focused on civil society and the power of participation as symbolic of democracy as a whole. In all nations and states, political engagement is needed for

marginalized peoples to get their wants and needs heard. “High levels of political and civic participation increase the likelihood that the voices of ordinary citizens will be heard” on important issues that affect them (Wike & Castillo, 2018). Engagement gives citizens a power that is seen as instrumental for development and growth, rather than no action (Kieffer, 1984). Other scholars have reached to the extent, declaring political participation as a human right (Steiner, 1988). These implications show the importance of political engagement.

Despite these positive links, poor governmental relations create limited political engagement in many of countries. The ability to have a voice in the country one resides in is a privilege denied to many throughout the world. Historically speaking, many marginalized groups have been shut out of representation in their governments. As Smith states, political communities are not natural or primordial, but rather results of long, historical processes (Smith, 2010). As is often the case, indigenous communities are especially targeted to be shut out. In some groups, changes are beginning to take place (Madrid, 2011), but in many disenfranchised groups are forgotten. In many of these communities there is a lack of voting rights (Coates & Holroyd, 2014), no political parties that represent the group’s interests (Pallister, 2013), and difficult access to government services.

Additionally, some citizens do not want to engage in political participation. In a study conducted by the Pew Research Organization in collaboration with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the public is disengaged from politics throughout the world (Wike & Castillo, 2018). Face to face surveys were taken in 14 nations with a wide range of political systems. The results indicated that other than voting, few people took part in other forms of political and civic participation. Additionally, issues of health care, poverty, and education were

the most likely to inspire political action (Wike & Castillo, 2018). There was also a strong link seen between education and political participation.

Non-participation is common in many countries for other reasons as well. The use of fear and discrimination as motivators to scare citizens from engaging in politics is widespread in many countries. Salamon and Van Evera (1973) examined voting habits among black participants in Mississippi in 1965. It is common for political scientists to assume that a lack of participation is due to lack of caring, low education, or low class of the group in question (Salamon & Van Evera, 1973). However, the authors demonstrated that the integration of fear and discrimination made voters much less likely to act, with fear tactics as the most effective boundary. Lack of actions were not due to lack of caring, but rather a concern for safety (Salamon & Van Evera, 1973). Other circumstances like a continually shifting political atmosphere can influence participation levels. An increase in distrust of government can lead to lower levels of participation. Updated research about political attitudes, values, and participation in Mexico demonstrate that a distrust of the governmental institution can cause citizens to influence low rates of political participation (Pastrana-Valls, 2018). These shifts in beliefs follow the shifts in participation.

While these factors may shy individuals away from political involvement, indigenous communities still fight to be included despite the odds. Political engagement has benefits for members of a community and state. This type of engagement has real impacts on policy and decisions made at the local, regional, and national level.

#### ***IV. Ways of Engagement:***

Different kinds of involvement are some of the ways that marginalized groups could win some power over their governments and form some agency. By choosing to engage with the

political sphere in either domestic or international ways, they are making a choice to try to improve their situation. This is a powerful statement for groups who are suppressed and marginalized. Indigenous groups could use these tools to get governments to help their personal agendas.

#### *Voting:*

Voting can be an easy and succinct way of establishing and furthering political motives. In many circumstances, advocates can easily vote for candidates that appeal to their cause with relatively little effort. However, marginalized groups are often cheated out of voting rights (Coates & Holroyd, 2014). Governments and institutional bodies can suppress voting rights and place increased difficulties on certain populations with laws regarding voter identification or fear tactics (Salamon & Van Evera, 1973). For voting to be an effective way of bringing change, the population in question should generally be large or have an influence on other portions. Voting can give marginalized people a sense of empowerment and activism that is hard to have otherwise. Madrid (2011) talks about how ethnic communities in Peru have received a new voice. Previously left out of voting and elections, they have become a desirable group that politician's campaign to (Madrid, 2011). This action brings agency to voters, allowing them to impact the community for their benefit when they work together.

#### *Political Parties:*

The creation of political parties can allow disenfranchised people to have a strong voice as well. Pallister (2013) discusses the historic lack of a national Mayan political party in Guatemala. This has led to uneven political representation in the country with political repression and violence as the main causes (Pallister, 2013). With the implementation of political parties for groups who have been discriminated against, it would create a sense of civil society and

communication throughout the marginalized people (Winter-Levy & Lalwani, 2018). This would further build a lasting platform for people to share their voices and ideas. Creating this sense of civil society is important in states which have had a history of discrimination. It is a great tool for groups that make up a substantial part of the population to get behind, which will represent their needs on a local or even a national level.

#### *International Appeals:*

Working through international means is different than utilizing domestic measures for change. Communities do not need a large population if they can manage to grab the attention of the international sphere. However, international appeals can have additional barriers. It can be more difficult to access the greater world and accomplish goals. International appeals are a good method of engagement for bringing international attention to an area if governments have been poor to their citizens. International figures are good at accomplishing this, by traveling to other countries and international organizations to speak out about wrongs. Recognition by international organizations can also help meet needs. Authors Coates and Holroyd (2014), talk extensively about UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was a collaborative effort of indigenous people around the world to get countries and the United Nations to recognize their rights to representation, land, and autonomy. International appeals may work better in democracies, as the pressures of the international community can have a more detrimental effect.

#### **An Examination of the Cases:**

All three cases were chosen because they depict groups who have faced similar, historic, suffering at the hands of their democratic countries. Examining these cases in more detail will

tell us about their specific circumstances and their mobilization efforts. While all these groups have different histories, they have faced the same type of discrimination and marginalization, being reduced to 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens with their land stolen for its' natural resources.

### ***I. Mayans in Guatemala***

Today there are about 21 different communities of Mayans in Guatemala, with these communities making up over 51% of the population of the country, with some estimates saying up to 80% (Minority Rights, 2018a; Canadian Mennonite University, 1994). This is the only indigenous culture that represents a majority of the population in a Central American country. Despite taking up the majority of Guatemala, the Mayan population has been systematically discriminated against for years.

Mayan people have lived in and around Guatemala for thousands of years. The current Mayans are descendants from the ancient Mayan empire which thrived for about 3,000 years, between 2,600 B.C.E. to 1,300 C.E and spread across multiple countries in Central America. This empire was densely populated, with far reaching production and trade routes, as well as sophisticated written language, mathematics, and science (Minority Rights, 2018a). When the Spanish arrived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Mayan empire was already in decline from its prime. The invasion sparked a faster decline. Disease spread rampantly, and the Spanish were quick to take land and use the Mayan people for forced labor on plantations. This was the first of three 'holocausts' against the Mayans. The Spanish invasion in the 16th century wiped out vast numbers of the Mayan people and destroyed cultural values with the implementation of Catholicism and Spanish culture. The second 'holocaust' was the vast land dispossession in the 19th century as a result of the Liberal Revolution in Guatemala (Minority Rights, 2018a).

The 1960s saw a wave of Mayan social movements across Guatemala, demanding land and fair wages after years of oppression. The movements faced waves of repression and violence, highlighted in 1980, when the Spanish Embassy was burned to the ground with 39 Mayan leaders inside, seeking refuge from the violence. This prompted the beginning of an armed insurgency group, the Guatemala National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), and subsequent war (Minority Rights, 2018a). Although this was between the rebel group and the Guatemalan government, there was a large scale, coordinated campaign of violence that Guatemala's military delivered against the Mayan population. The state's response hit an all time high, where the military officers in control targeted Mayans regardless of their involvement in the conflict. Classified as a genocide by the United Nations this was the third 'holocaust'. 200,000 ethnic Mayans were killed, 200,000 fled to Mexico, and an additional 1,000,000 were internally displaced (HMH, n.d.). The military has also been condemned for its widespread human rights violations during this period.

Other hardships that the Mayans have faced include lack of land and repression of culture. The Ladinos (non-Indigenous Guatemalans) take up about 3% of the population and own about 80% of the land, as of 2002, and control the government (Murphy, 2002). Additionally, school children have historically been forced to learn in Spanish, with bilingual education as a rare option in the country. This emphasizes the cultural repression. Other struggles include historic oppression of voting rights. While all Guatemalans enjoy universal suffrage, fear and intimidation have been rampant in the past, and voter registration laws and timing of elections during harvest season have historically limited Mayan involvement in the polls.

Despite the widespread violence and discrimination, indigenous movements have continued, focusing on civil, land, cultural rights, bilingual education, and the recognition of

local Mayan authorities. In 1992 an exiled Mayan activist, Rigoberta Menchú won the Nobel Peace Prize for the advocacy that she did abroad on behalf of the Mayans. This gave international recognition to the Mayan cause and helped motivate the Mayan people.

“I do not expect others to love the Mayan people. With a different conception of reality, a different language, and a different community into which we were born, it is only natural that our experiences have been unlike those of other peoples. Nonetheless, we are not different and separate from the other peoples of this continent.” – Rigoberta Menchú (1994)

Today, Mayans remain motivated to politically engage and better their situation. Enduring the struggles they have faced, the majority chooses not to resort to violence, and rather fight their battles in the political realm. According to Pallister (2013), Mayans have succeeded at taking control of the local politics by using local political parties. There has been limited progress at the national level, due to the strong grip that the Ladinos have on the national government. However, by making changes at the local level it leaves room for further advancement further down the line.

## *II. Quechua in Peru*

Quechua people also have a long history in Peru. Their existence pre-dates and coincides with the Incan Empire of South America but they have faced significant discrimination since the contact period. The ramifications of the Spanish taking control during the colonial-era forced most of the native population into slavery with a complete loss of their land. Revolts by the indigenous people against the landowners happened several times throughout the centuries but were largely unsuccessful until reforms by the infamous dictator in the 60's granted some land to the Quechua. These benefits appeased the Quechua for a little, until they faced momentous loss again. The Peruvian Civil War started in the 1980s between the government and the Sendero

Luminoso, a leftist guerilla group. This group was initially well received by the indigenous for its education reforms yet this soon shifted as Sendero Luminoso brutally repressed peasants and executed community leaders (Minority Rights, 2018b). Quechua villages soon became targeted by the government counter-insurgency groups as well. Eventually, the Quechua worked with the government to aid in the downfall of Sendero Luminoso in 1992. Soon after the Quechua's help, the government enlisted in a forcible sterilization program led by President Alberto Fujimori. This program was much praised by the non-indigenous population and targeted primarily poor, indigenous women, sterilizing thousands in accordance to government quotas (Lizarzaburu, 2015).

Current struggles for the Quechua relate more around ethnic discrimination and land rights. The Peruvian Amazon serves as a hotbed for natural resources. This has caused many conflicts with the government and private organizations over the years. The government has development ambitions that directly collides with indigenous claims of territory (Stetson, 2012). The Amazon is rich with oil that can be a large profit for organizations. However, the extraction of oil has historically led to severe pollution of the water resources of the Quechua people (Minority Rights, 2018b).

The Quechua account for nearly 33% of Peru's population (Minority Rights, 2018b). They make up over 80% of Peru's indigenous population as well. While this is a substantial number, it is under-representative of how many Quechua there actually are. Due to severe social stigma attached to being indigenous, many of Peru's population identify themselves as mestizo, even if they speak Quechua or have Quechua ancestry. There is a large portion of the indigenous population that falls below the poverty line in Peru, and the Quechua are historically found to be

politically marginalized (Madrid, 2011). Additionally, the location of this group in the highlands situates them away from the political centers of the elite class.

In 1980, the literacy requirement for voting was removed and indigenous participation skyrocketed. Originally, the Quechua and other groups voted similar to non-indigenous groups, but as time went on, indigenous groups began to have a distinct voice in the elections. This change prompted candidates to appeal and win the votes of the indigenous, granting them a power not typical of their position (Madrid, 2011). This large voting gap between the indigenous and non-indigenous is considered surprising because unlike, Bolivia and Ecuador, Peru has no large indigenous movement, or influential political party. The Peruvian indigenous movement is considered weak and fragmented. This is most likely due to the level of violence that this group has experienced (Madrid, 2014). Despite this, indigenous voters engage in ethnic voting even with the absence of a party (Madrid, 2011). By voting as a group, Quechua members support candidates that directly campaign to the group. This grants the Quechua power to influence elections and changes for their community.

### ***III. Inuit in Canada***

There are about 60,000 Inuit living in Canada, making up less than 1% of the Canadian population (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016a). Encounters between the Inuit and Europeans started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as explorers began to sail into the icy waters of David Strait, Hudson Strait, and Hudson Bay (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016b). While these initial contacts were not as harsh and brutal as they were for the Mayan and Quechua, soon Inuit began to lose traditional land, health, and culture. Whalers began to travel to the arctic in hordes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After the whalers established permanent settlements in the Arctic, Inuit populations began to suffer from disease, causing immense population loss (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016b). They also decimated

whale populations, an essential element of Inuit survival. Soon, the Hudson Bay Company, which had taken possession of the Inuit land, sold it to the Canadian government in parcels without consultation of the Inuit (Minority Rights, 2020).

There have been historic tensions between the Inuit and the Canadian government, due to forced relocations in the past and limitations on their ways of subsistence. In the 1950's the Canadian government took Inuit living in northern Quebec villages and forcibly relocated them to the High Arctic without adequate supplies (Minority Rights, 2020). This was to assert Canada's sovereignty over the region as it was being threatened by other states. There have also been generations of forced assimilations, with requiring boarding schools for Inuit children where they would be punished for being in cultural dress or speaking their native tongue (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016b). Currently, alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicide rates are out of control for Inuit populations (Minorities at Risk, 2009). These have been directly related to the influx of European presence over the last couple centuries, with the Inuit facing lack of autonomy and more.

Significant legislation in Canada over the years has worked to give these groups increased rights, but backlash from the indigenous community has been loud, often angering and offending Canadian officials who believe they have created fair conditions (Coates & Holroyd, 2014). Due to the small number, voting rights do not impact this community substantially, similar to political parties. The community is resilient however, speaking of racism to other communities worldwide.

The Inuit have fought to be members on international organizations such as the Arctic Council, which legislates decisions about the usage of the Arctic Circle between countries (Forgerson, 2015). While they have become members among the other arctic nations, their status

remains that of participant, meaning that they do not have voting power to affect decisions that impact their territory. This continues the trend of indigenous rights taking second place over a state's economic and political incentives. As Coates and Holroyd (2014) write, the Inuit have also recently led the campaign for Canada to pass and ratify UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which would grant them a new platform to fight on. This declaration would officially recognize indigenous rights across the world. Canada remains one of four nations in the world who have not signed onto this momentous legislation, unwilling to recognize the human rights of indigenous peoples (Minority Rights, 2020). Canada's Inuit population has remained remarkably active, considering the difficulties with their small size and relative isolation. Through involvement on international organizations, and fighting for the implementation of UNDRIP, the Inuit tend to use international attention to fight for their causes. This has been decently successful for them thus far.

### **Research Methodology:**

In order to adequately see how peaceful political engagement helps indigenous communities in fighting for their rights, these three cases will be compared. These three countries commonly utilize different means of engagement. To compare why that is, a Most Similar System of Design has been applied to this study. Through this methodology, factors such as democracy, status as indigenous groups, grievances held, goals, percent of the population that the indigenous group takes up, and ways of engagement were compared. These factors were chosen because differences in such could demonstrate or explain why the current method of political activism was different for each of the groups.

Democracy was judged to be an important factor because active political engagement from all parties in a country is essential to a democracy holding strong. In a democratic nation with elected representatives there would be one methodology that suppressed groups turn to in order to get their needs addressed. The status as a politically active indigenous group was confirmed by the Minorities at Risk qualitative dataset (Minorities at Risk, 2009). We also looked at grievances held by the three indigenous groups. Using Gurr's (1993) argument, we determine if the group is likely to mobilize based on the three qualifications. 1. If there is a threat to the cultural identity, 2. if there are inequalities the indigenous group faces, and 3. if there is a historical loss of autonomy. The desired outcome can also impact how a group approaches a conflict. Therefore, goals of the three cases were compared. These were judged by accounts from the groups themselves. Next, we examined the percent of population that the indigenous group takes up in a country. Using measures from Minority Rights to determine percentage, this was to examine if the size of the group in comparison to the country can change how they function. Finally, the MSS looked at the current methods of political engagement that the different indigenous groups favor. This Most Similar System table has been created to showcase these findings and clearly organizes the results.

**Figure 1. Most Similar Systems Table**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Mayans in Guatemala</b>	<b>Quechua in Peru</b>	<b>Inuit in Canada</b>	<b>Similarity</b>
<b>Government System</b>	Presidential Republic	Presidential Republic	Federal Parliamentary Democracy	Yes
<b>Group Status</b>	Politically active indigenous group	Politically active indigenous group	Politically active indigenous group	Yes
<b>Historic measures of discrimination/marginalization (measured by 1. threats to cultural identity, 2. inequality, &amp; 3. historical loss of autonomy)</b>	1. Yes 2. Yes 3. Yes	1. Yes 2. Yes 3. Yes	1. Yes 2. Yes 3. Yes	Yes
<b>Goals</b>	Increased rights and representation	Increased rights and representation	Increased rights and representation	Yes
<b>% Native Population</b>	< 51% of Guatemala's population	About 33% of Peru's population	>1% of Canada's population	<b>No</b>
<b>Methods of Political Engagement</b>	Local Political Parties	Ethnic Voting	International Appeals	<b>No</b>

Sources: (CIA World Factbook, 2019; Minorities at Risk Dataset, 2009; Minorities Rights, 2018)

**Analysis:**

The Mayans, Quechua, and Inuit have many similarities in their experiences and situations, yet they maintain different methods of political engagement. The following paragraphs examine why this may be.

While both Guatemala and Peru classify as presidential republics, and Canada runs as a federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy, all three of these systems of government are democratic and have representative forms of government (CIA World Factbook). They all have representatives elected into government to vote and make laws on their behalf. If different forms of government were depicted, a variance in political engagement methods could possibly be explained. However, democratic governance does not affect the method of political engagement utilized.

The Minorities at Risk (2009) qualitative dataset confirmed that all three groups were politically active indigenous movements. This database has tracked 'at risk' ethnic groups with the most recent update of their qualitative data in 2009. In this dataset, the researchers detailed the hardships of the different indigenous groups and suggested reasons why they had potential for mobilization against the state. Their collective status as indigenous groups provide them with a connection which could indicate similar resistance methods. Despite this indication, the resistance methods are varied across the cases.

The next similarity that these three groups share is the historic to recent levels of discrimination. The Mayans, Quechua, and Inuit have all suffered from threats to their cultural identity, inequality, and a historical loss of autonomy. Examples of these endeavors include forced assimilation in educational programs, inequality through wages and representation, and frequent loss of land from government interference. These shared circumstances make these groups likely to choose similar methods of political resistance to fix the same historic problems. However, this was not validated in the table.

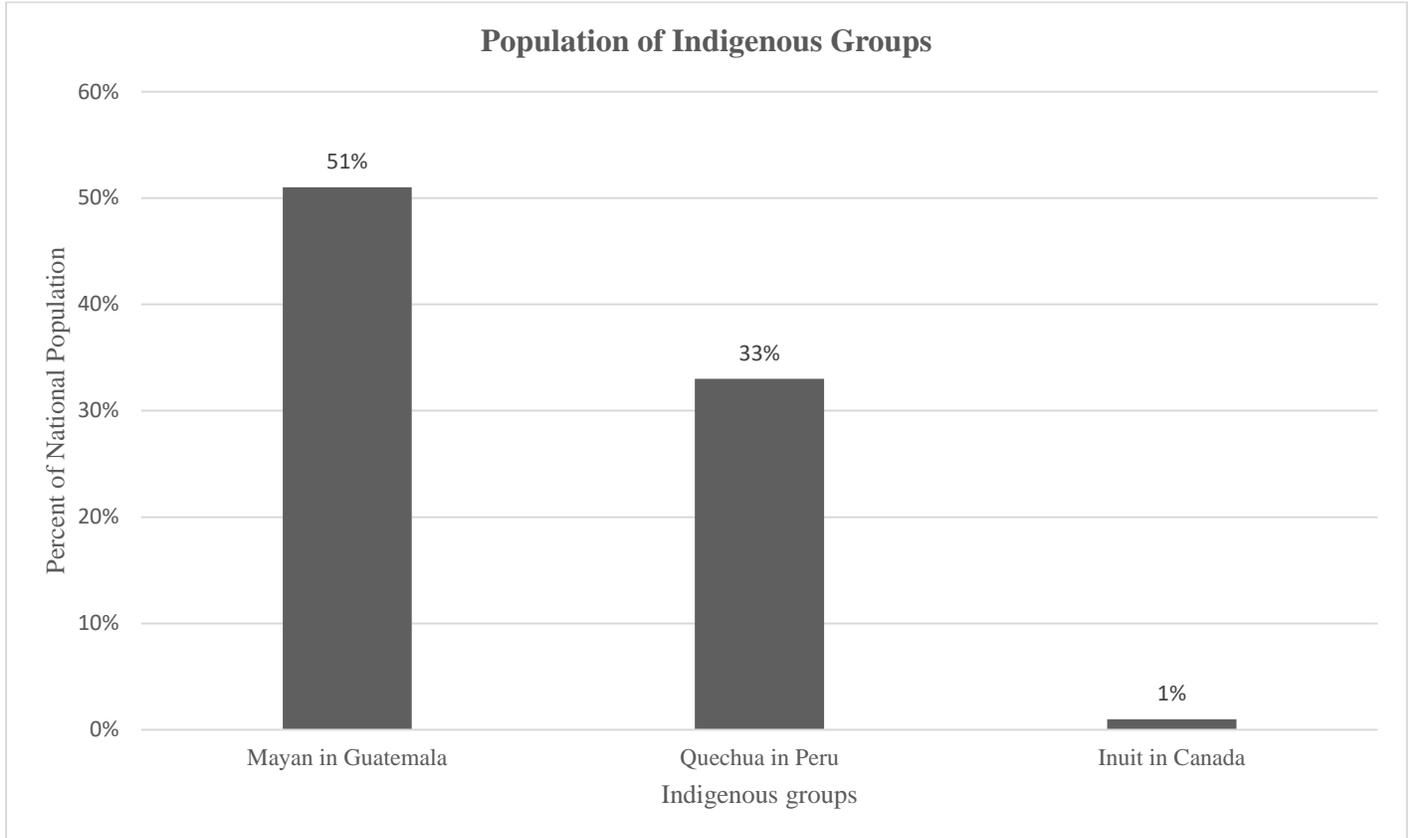
If their goals were the same it would make sense for groups to utilize the same method of resistance across the board, yet these indigenous groups have not. The Mayans, Quechua, and

Inuit all look to expand upon their rights and representation in their respective government systems. These goals are the same throughout, but the ways of political engagement each group chooses is different.

The one striking difference in this study are the different percentages of population that the indigenous groups make up in their respective nations. The Mayans make up at least 51% of Guatemala's population, the Quechua make up around 33% of Peru's, and the Inuit make up less than 1% of Canada's (Minority Rights, 2018a, 2018b, 2020). The different make ups play a huge role in how the indigenous group functions in the state. This changes the dynamics immensely between the group and the state. Larger groups have access to more opportunities, different methods of political engagement or resistance, and can manage to have a power in the democracy that can affect change just by their presence. This is not the case in smaller indigenous communities.

After looking at the results for the different groups, the Most Similar Systems Table shows a stark picture. Representing populations from North, Central, and South America, all the marginalized groups have experience with oppression and discrimination that stems from the state. These indigenous communities reside in democratic nations, are all politically active, share similar historic discrimination and marginalization patterns, have similar goals; and yet they all have chosen different methods of political engagement to try to create change in their countries. The resonating difference between these communities is the percentage of the state's population that they occupy. This percentage can clearly be seen in the Population Percentage of Indigenous Groups graph located below. Interestingly, the percentage of the ethnic group in the country does not seem to influence the experience of discrimination felt by that group nor does it seem to improve their social standing.

**Figure 2. Population Percentage of Indigenous Groups.**



Sources: (Minority Rights, 2018)

The different methods that the groups choose directly reflects these percentages. The political opportunities in Guatemala are largely due to the fact that Mayans make up a majority of the population with at least 51%. The Mayans have faced horrible ethnic and political persecution throughout the last 40 years in Guatemala, however, the creation of localized political committees is a step towards better conditions. With local political parties, the Mayans gain the power to influence civil society, and have been able to better their local conditions with education reform and more through local office (Pallister, 2013). With these systems, the Mayans have more opportunities to directly increase representation and push out advocates for their cause. While they have not made significant headway at the national level, the utilization of

their numbers to improve their localities has remained important for the indigenous movement. The widespread local control that Mayans have in Guatemala is a feat largely accomplished due to their numbers.

Although the Quechua do not make up most of Peru's population, they still control a sizeable amount. With 33% of the population, the Quechua can exercise influence through ethnic voting. Leaders in Peru have noticed the power of the Quechua's voting influence and now campaign directly to the native towns and villages. This newfound power gives the Quechua an influence over elections. These candidates must be able to appeal to the Quechua people in order to help their ballot. By using their voting capabilities and their sway over the elections due to their numbers, the Quechua have obtained opportunities that help them in the long run. The community has also managed to bring together its population to vote in the same way with ethnic voting to make their vote more powerful. They simply would not have been taken seriously if the numbers did not matter to political candidates.

Small groups like the Inuit would not be able to make or influence any changes to the political spectrum even if all the members voted for a particular candidate or created a political party. The Inuit represent a remarkably small portion of the Canadian population, less than 1%, so their wants and demands are very low priority, even for a democracy. They simply do not have the numbers to pull off changes via domestic politics. Yet, by going to the international realm, the Inuit stand to change their situation. Through pressuring the Canadian government to improve their situation by bringing international attention to it, speaking at the UN, or getting seats on international organizations, the Inuit create power where they might not have had it otherwise. By bringing attention to the actions and racism in their country, the Inuit

simultaneously empower other indigenous movements, while improving their own position through government shaming.

While there are difficulties for most minority groups in the political realm, those that make up a small portion of the population have a much more limited range of options for actions to take. For example, the Mayans who make up a majority have engaged in international appeals in the past with their advocate Rigoberta Menchú, along with ethnic voting and local representation. This contrasts with the Inuit who have most of their accomplishments through direct national or international appeals. Following this trend, it appears that smaller communities would be more prone to choosing international appeals. While work at the domestic level may be difficult for any indigenous group regardless of population percentage because of discrimination, it is virtually impossible for smaller ethnic groups. This is not because of formal barriers like restrictions of voting rights, but just based on logistics.

However, this does not mean that the ways of political engagement used by small indigenous groups are any less effective than methods of larger groups. While there is not a measure to quantify effectiveness or success for these different methods in this paper, the international appeals that the Inuit favor seem to work well. Partially because of work by the Inuit, Canada has switched its position from a non-signer of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People to supporting the declaration. The Inuit have also successfully managed to get seats on international organizations and have been a clear and ever-present voice at organizations like the United Nations. In fact, it could be argued that these international measures are more effective than the domestic means. Through creating a lot of noise, the Inuit have managed to represent themselves on an international panel, the Arctic Council. While there are still downfalls, such as they have not secured voting rights in that organization, the Inuit still

have succeeded in bringing their problems to an international audience and manage to represent themselves while doing so.

The unfortunate situation is that often, forms of political engagement only work when it is in the reigning government's interest to grant rights to the indigenous population. This has often been a second priority compared to economic or political development and is often used as a PR stunt. While this reality creates doubt about the benefits of attempting to fight back and become an advocate, it still stands that any progress the group can make would be beneficial. With the use of domestic or international means of political engagement, governments have a difficult time pushing groups to the side when their voice is strong. The benefits of working through domestic efforts, like the Mayans and Quechua do, is that it is more difficult for their governments to shut down these efforts without suppressing democracy. While this has happened before, it calls into question human rights abuses and creates another range of international problems for the administrations. When groups make international appeals, it brings attention into a state, which has resulted in them wavering and granting requests (Coates & Holroyd, 2014). This has been the case with both Mayan and Inuit.

Through any of these methods of political engagement, indigenous communities are staring their governments down and demanding change. With methods like local parties, voting, or international appeals, these groups have succeeded in creating change to better their political situation. The best way to succeed is through legitimate, political means. Even in situations where oppression is widespread, or the percentage of population is very low, these cases prove that it is possible to use political engagement to create change.

## **Conclusion and Further Research Questions:**

This research benefited by using a Most Similar Systems Design for comparison. Using MSS, this study was able to compare different elements about the three indigenous movements and determine how and why different methods of political engagement benefited them. In many states, ethnic groups that do not fit in with the state's ideal image are pushed to the sidelines and ostracized. Despite these external pressures, many of the communities have continued to resist and make changes in the state they reside in. This paper's hypothesis has been confirmed, with population percentage seeming to have an impact on how a group decides to politically engage. The smaller a group is, the more limitations they have and the likelihood of resulting to international appeals is also increased.

This research project has managed to gain some significant conclusions regarding the role that population can play in determining resistance movements. For future research, this would be improved upon by broadening the scope of this study to include more countries, possibly by comparing all native groups across the Western Hemisphere or perhaps the world. Additionally, creating a measure to quantify effectiveness of methods of political engagement would be a good alternate comparison to bring in when discussing how political engagement is beneficial.

All these methods of resistance demonstrate how political engagement, whether on the international or domestic level, can help indigenous movements in securing more rights and representation for their communities. The make-up of an indigenous community in a state is an important factor because it changes the dynamics between the group and the state, but it does not limit the effectiveness of the community. Small indigenous communities have shown to be just as, if not more, effective with their methods of political engagement as larger indigenous communities. While indigenous communities still struggle everyday with fighting against the

state for rights, these case studies can offer examples of how the use of domestic and international appeals can help create meaningful change. Indigenous groups continue to push for increased rights, equality, and reparations for past wrongs through political engagement. Through these efforts, they can better their situation, and take charge.

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