

Failure of a pan-Mayan Party? Explaining Mayan Political Participation in Guatemala

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Political Science and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: August 25, 2015

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Date approved: August 25, 2015

## **Abstract**

Over the past 20 years, indigenous groups across Latin America have gained significant ground in their respective countries' national politics. Factors relating to institutional reforms and effective populist appeals have created several successful national indigenous parties in Bolivia and Ecuador in particular. Guatemala is a case that many scholars are puzzled by because it shares many similarities of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian political and ethnic landscapes, but has not developed a national indigenous party.

The research pertaining to the rise of Latin American indigenous parties can be understood in two prominent groups. Institutionalists point to changes in electoral rules as a determining factor. In addition, institutionalists concentrate on nationwide politics, not local politics. The second group, ethnopopulists, explain that the rise of indigenous parties is due to these parties making indigenous and populist claims without alienating the non-indigenous population. However, neither of these approaches adequately addresses this so-called "failure" of the Maya in Guatemala to form a pan-Mayan party.

This thesis challenges both of these narratives by focusing on Mayan participation at the local level. I argue that traditional institutions at the city/village level influence the Mayan population to participate locally. Additionally, divisions within the Mayan community prevent a level of unity necessary to build a political party to run at the national level. Although I question the limitations of these two approaches, I find it unlikely a pan-Mayan will form in the foreseeable future due to the Mayas preference to participate solely at the local level

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The rise and success of indigenous parties in Latin America has been a surprising development the past couple of decades, leading scholars to explain the rise of successful indigenous movements in countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. Within the research there is a divide between two approaches to understanding indigenous parties. One group of scholars emphasizes institutional reforms and learning effects from other countries to explain the success of indigenous movements and parties in the region. The other group emphasizes how successful indigenous parties develop a programmatic platform and make inclusive appeals that allow them to appeal to the non-indigenous populations. Combined, this research has allowed for better understanding of the success of indigenous parties and candidates in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru.

However, a case that is often overlooked when evaluating indigenous political participation in Latin America is Guatemala. A quick glance at Guatemala would appear to make it a very likely case to develop an indigenous party. It has a very large indigenous population, 40 to 60 percent of the population. It has a semi-active, semi-strong indigenous movement that was instrumental in ending Guatemala's 36-year civil war and gaining the recognition of indigenous rights in law. However, since the end of the war and signing of peace accords in 1996, the indigenous movement has not coalesced into an active political movement. There have been some efforts to mold the Mayan movement into a political party, such as Winaq led by Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rigoberta Menchu, which is the first national Mayan party in Guatemala. But it has only received around 3 percent of the vote in the most recent presidential elections.

Due to this fact, many researchers treat Guatemala as an outlier case in comparison to other Latin American countries with active indigenous movements and label it as a 'failed' case. However, I argue that this is a misguided view of Mayan political participation in Guatemala because Mayan political participation is more diverse than national parties.

Instead a fuller evaluation of Maya political participation should focus not at the national level but at how Mayan groups participate at the local level. Mayan communities tend to focus locally and do not necessarily want or need to move past this level of government. The argument that Mayans participate locally is the focus of this thesis.

This paper makes use of the 2012 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey for Guatemala and applies a model of indigenous voting as proposed by Madrid (2012) to Guatemala. After looking at the results of the survey, I evaluate the literature that assesses other potential explanations of Mayan political participation. From this literature, it can be seen that labeling Guatemala as a failure is misleading.

First, I will cover the existing literature on the advantages of indigenous parties in Latin America. There is a considerable support for the argument that having an indigenous party is beneficial to the indigenous people and to political stability and democracy. Next, I will review the key arguments in this literature by institutionalists and ethnopopulists. Then, I will run models predicting vote for an indigenous candidate in Guatemala. Next, I will look at the literature that explains the different routes of participation by the various Mayan groups in Guatemala. Finally, I will conclude with thoughts for future paths of research in regards to Mayan politics in Guatemala.

## **Why Indigenous Parties?**

What are the advantages of indigenous parties? Why can't mainstream parties address indigenous concerns? These questions are of concern when evaluating the need for indigenous parties. Previous research demonstrates how mainstream parties have failed to represent indigenous groups. Usually mainstream parties will pay lip service and gain recognized rights for indigenous groups in law but this will be the extent of the help (Van

Cott 2010a). Because of this fact, indigenous parties should be able to advance indigenous rights and needs more than mainstream parties.

Madrid (2005a) argues indigenous parties could lead to the improved representation of indigenous groups and expand participation that has been limited by historical injustices and marginalization within Latin American societies. In addition, indigenous parties could reduce systemic volatility, increase the support for democracy, and reduce violence. Marginalization of Latin America's indigenous peoples has occurred under both authoritarian and democratic governments and, therefore has discouraged indigenous groups from being active within the political arena. Mainstream parties will sometimes adopt some of the issues important to the indigenous community and try to gain the support of indigenous voters by supporting indigenous politicians (Van Cott 2010a). However, this support is often symbolic and not truly representative of indigenous needs or wants. On the other hand, when an indigenous party runs for office, there is a higher chance indigenous people will participate in politics and establish a stronger connection between elected officials and their constituents.

When indigenous parties gain representation in a legislature, Madrid (2005b, 2005c) argues that they reduce systemic volatility and party system fragmentation. Nations with the highest rates of electoral volatility have a large percentage of the population that is indigenous because indigenous groups are underrepresented and make up a large percentage of the population. Indigenous populations, more often than not, do not trust mainstream parties to represent their interests and, therefore, do not participate in elections. Thus, the indigenous community is underrepresented and not included in the political process. Mainstream parties fail to adequately represent the views and needs of the indigenous community and cannot establish a foothold in the indigenous community. This creates an opening for indigenous parties to form and gain the trust of the indigenous

community. Thus, indigenous parties can then give a voice to the indigenous community, bringing this community back into the active political arena, and ideally leading to more stability of the party system.

In short, Madrid (2005a) implies that indigenous parties could lead to an increase in support for democracy and a reduction in politically oriented violence. Indigenous parties create a voice for the indigenous population, and would presumably foster support for democracy. Indigenous populations in numerous Latin American states do not support democracy at the same level the non-indigenous population does; they tend to be wary of democratic institutions. Madrid (2005a) shows this through by using data from various surveys from the late 1990s and early 2000s such as Latino barometer and LAPOP.

Madrid also discusses how increased indigenous representation can lead to a decrease in the use of extreme measures to raise political awareness. He examines indigenous protests in Bolivia that led to widespread death and destruction prior to MAS. In Bolivia, the non-violent rise of indigenous parties such as MAS showed that the indigenous populations no longer felt the need to protest and use violence to be heard. Ideally, indigenous populations begin to believe they have an outlet to be heard and will not resort to violence once they have an indigenous party that represent their views.

## **Institutionalists versus Ethnopolitists**

Research evaluating the rise and success of indigenous parties in Latin America is demarcated between two differing theoretical approaches. The first theoretical approach concentrates upon the role of institutions. These scholars evaluate the effect of institutional change in understanding the rise of indigenous parties in Latin America. Their thesis is that institutional change, such as change in party registration rules, change in district



magnitude, and new electoral rules, have had a positive effect on indigenous party formation and success.

The second theoretical approach focuses upon the strategies indigenous parties use, specifically ethnopopulism. Scholars from this theoretical approach argue that indigenous parties in the region have been most successful is when they run as ethnopopulist parties and can appeal to the indigenous population and groups within the non-indigenous population. By evaluating these two theoretical approaches, it brings to light how neither camp can fully explain indigenous political participation in Guatemala and how there is a need to evaluate participation there in a different light.

### **Institutionalist Approach**

Institutional arguments for understanding the rise of indigenous parties in Latin America are very prominent within the literature. Institutional scholars evaluate whether changes in institutions have created the environment that has encouraged indigenous party formation. Concentration upon institutional change is due to in the past couple of decades numerous Latin American countries have implemented institutional reforms to encourage the participation of underrepresented groups (McNeish 2008). The institutions these scholars most often cite are registration rules, electoral rules, district magnitude, and reserved seats.

The most prominent of the institutional scholars is Donna Lee Van Cott. Her research is concentrated in South America, where indigenous parties have had the most success. Much of her research concentrates upon institutional reform and its effects on indigenous parties primarily in South America. Her findings have shown institutions do matter but that they alone cannot explain the rise of indigenous parties in South America.

Van Cott (2003) evaluates institutional change in six South American countries: Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, and more in-depth case studies of Bolivia and

Ecuador. In this study, Van Cott demonstrates how changes in institutional rules have a positive effect on indigenous party success. Van Cott concentrates upon regulations placed on political parties that reduce the number of parties elected. She finds that when these regulations are eliminated and party systems become decentralized, it makes it easier for indigenous parties to form and have success since they do not need to raise funds for a nationwide campaign. She also examines how reserved seats lead to indigenous parties to gain power. In addition, Van Cott discusses other rule changes that impact the rise of indigenous parties such as increasing district magnitude. Where district magnitude was increased, such as in Colombia, it has led to indigenous parties gaining political power. Van Cott concludes while these institutional changes have influenced the rise of indigenous parties, they alone cannot explain their rise and success.

Van Cott (2010b) finds institutional factors continue to play a strong role in indigenous party formation and success a decade and a half after these parties first emerged on the political scene. She uses data from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, and Argentina to demonstrate how institutional factors are key to whether an indigenous party will form and have success. The institutional factors Van Cott identifies as key to indigenous party formation and success are increased ballot access, decentralization, and the reservation of seats for indigenous representatives.

In addition to these rule changes, Van Cott identifies openness of the party system as crucial to indigenous party formation and success. While not a rule, this explanation fits neatly into the institutional argument for understanding the rise of indigenous parties. Indigenous parties had an opening in the party system due to the decline of left-leaning parties since the 1980s. When these parties declined, this created an opening for indigenous parties to gain a foothold and address indigenous demands in the political system. Thus, it can be concluded an open party system falls into the institutional argument.

Van Cott and Rice (2010) find that social cleavage and institutional explanations for the rise of indigenous parties in Latin America can explain some of the rise of indigenous parties. However, both conclude that more explanation for the rise of indigenous parties is needed. Van Cott and Rice believe that political learning and diffusion must also be taking place in order to account for the rise of successful indigenous parties. In addition, they believe that the indigenous movements organizationally are maturing, which allows for explanations outside of institutional arguments. There is also increasing de-alignment and party fragmentation throughout the region and the recognition of indigenous rights in law. Thus, Van Cott and Rice argue that institutional and social cleavage literature alone cannot explain the rise of indigenous parties.

Birnir (2004) evaluates how changing one rule in an institutional environment helps indigenous parties gain political power. She evaluates the effect costs have on party formation. She defines “formation costs” in the same terms as Simon Hug (2001), which are the institutional barriers a new party must overcome in order to participate in an election or continue participating. Using this understanding of formation costs, Birnir concentrates on pre-election formation cost by evaluating the effect of spatial registration rules on indigenous party formation.

Birnir uses evidence from Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and a more in-depth case study of Ecuador to demonstrate how pre-election spatial registration rules are a hindrance to the formation of indigenous parties in Latin America. Pre-election spatial registration rules are simply a requirement on political parties that they have registered members in different parts of a country. The effect of such rules can be detrimental to political parties concentrated in one area of the country. For example, Birnir finds in Ecuador the requirement for indigenous organizations to have registration in both the highlands and coastal areas, in spite of the fact there were very few indigenous groups in

the coastal regions, led to indigenous organizations in Ecuador struggling to gain political power. Once these rules were eliminated in 1995, Ecuador saw the success of indigenous parties. Birnir finds a similar effect in Peru, where there were spatial registration rules in place before being eliminated.

Birnir is not claiming the elimination of registration requirements alone led to the success of indigenous groups in Ecuador and Peru. Her main conclusion is the elimination of these rules creates a more welcoming institutional environment for indigenous groups to gain political office. While there are other factors influence formation of indigenous parties, Birnir concludes elimination of these rules would help in the formation of indigenous parties.

In all, the intuitionist approach has led to greater understanding for why indigenous parties have developed and continue to have success. These scholars have identified the various changes in electoral rules and party environment positively influenced the rise of indigenous parties in Latin America. They have also shed light on steps indigenous or ethnic parties need to pursue to change rules that make gaining office easier for these groups.

### **Ethnopolit Approach**

The second theoretical approach for understanding the rise of indigenous parties is the ethnopolit argument. The ethnopolit research thesis is that the rise and success of indigenous parties in Latin America is due to how indigenous political parties have presented themselves and how they run campaigns. Scholars using this lens for understanding indigenous participation argue what explains indigenous success is indigenous political parties run as ethnopolit parties. These parties make indigenous appeals to the indigenous population along with inclusive appeal to non-indigenous groups.

Ethnopolit parties also make populist appeal by promising the mass population of change and taking power away from the elites (Madrid 2008; Madrid 2012).

Madrid (2012) looks at Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. The core of Madrid's argument is that indigenous parties that have had the most success are the ones that have made appeals to both the indigenous and non-indigenous populations. In addition to parties appealing to both groups, successful indigenous parties have used populist appeals to create as large of an electoral coalition as possible. Populist appeals have been a very powerful method for appealing to both indigenous and non-indigenous supporters because of the increasing distrust and disillusionment of current political parties and those parties' neo-liberal orientation. The two most successful cases Madrid cites are Evo Morales with MAS in Bolivia and Pachakutik in Ecuador. Morales and his party MAS have been highly successful because they have combined indigenous and non-indigenous representation and offered an alternative to the neoliberal economic outlook of other parties in Bolivia. Parties in Ecuador, on the other hand, have pursued a different route in recent years. Pachakutik was able to achieve success in Ecuador similar to MAS in Bolivia by employing this inclusive tone and platform. However, Pachakutik in the mid-2000s began using a more exclusionary tone, appealing strictly to indigenous populations and alienating non-indigenous groups. They did not reach previous levels of support or actual representation when they had this more inclusive strategy. Madrid does not discount the other factors of institutional reform, indigenous movements, and change in party system rules, but feels the most important aspect is whether parties have tried to move beyond the indigenous community for support and whether this can explain indigenous party success.

Madrid tests the ethnopolit thesis by developing a model of predicting vote for an indigenous party by individual citizens. These models use share of presidential vote as a

means to measure success of an indigenous party. Along with identifying the key individual level factors, Madrid describes the necessary macro-level factors to achieve success, which are institutional reform, the decline of traditional parties, the use of ethnic appeals, and the use of populist and inclusionary appeals.

In sum, the ethnopopulist approach is more of a strategy for indigenous parties to take than any reform or action within government. This approach does not discount the effects of institutional reform or implementation of new rules. However, it does view the strategy of indigenous parties as the crucial aspect to the success of these parties.

Both the institutionalist and ethnopopulist approaches are incomplete in their explanations of the formation and success of indigenous parties. The institutional approach is lacking because of its concentration on national level politics. It does not give much attention to local level politics. On the other hand, the ethnopopulist approach makes assumptions about the homogeneity of an indigenous group and assumes all an indigenous party needs to do is implement the ethnopopulist strategy and success will come. In the next section, these missing aspects will be apparent in why both approaches have simply written Guatemala off as a “failed case.”

## **Indigenous Politics in Guatemala**

In the previous section, the debate between the institutionalists and ethnopopulists highlights divisions within the literature for understanding the rise and success of indigenous parties in Latin America. However, there are cases within Latin America that do not fit either explanation for indigenous party formation and success. One such case is Guatemala. This case is interesting because Guatemala has many similar characteristics as other countries in the region but has not seen the formation of a successful indigenous

party. The failure of a successful indigenous party in the country has led to scholars to be bewildered why a successful party has not developed in Guatemala.

The reason for this bewilderment is due to the characteristics of Guatemala. It has a very large indigenous population with estimates ranging from 40 percent of the population to 60 percent (Madrid 2012). This size of population would seem to lead to a high probability of a large indigenous party. However, this has not come to pass. There is an indigenous party in Guatemala, Winaq, but it has only received around 3 percent of the popular vote in the previous two presidential elections (Madrid 2012). Due to this reality it has led to scholars to investigate why there has not been a more successful indigenous party in Guatemala.

Research on indigenous parties in Guatemala is also demarcated between institutional and ethnopopulist arguments for the lack of a successful indigenous party. The institutionalists tend to emphasize the underinstitutionalization of Guatemala's party system and structural factors, such as historical violence and discrimination, Ethnopopulist scholars, on the other hand, cite the one Mayan party in Guatemala, Winaq, and its electoral strategy.

### **Institutional Approach in Guatemala**

Much of the institutionalists' concentration in Guatemala is evaluating indigenous participation is at the national level. Research focuses on the party system or lack thereof. Guatemala has an underinstitutionalized party system that has been called an "inchoate" party system or even a "non-system" (Jones 2011; Sanchez 2008; Sanchez 2009).

Scholars of Guatemala's party system demonstrate how political parties come and go and its destabilizing effect on democracy. Because parties come and go, they do not have roots in society and are often the vehicles of elites in Guatemala. However, because parties come and go, it does show party formation is not a costly endeavor and could be a positive

factor in influencing the formation of indigenous parties. Therefore, these scholars demonstrate there is the possibility of an indigenous party to develop with relative ease but they do discuss that the most successful political parties are vehicles for the political elite.

Scholars of Guatemala's party system highlight many issues indigenous organizations face in forming and being a successful political party. One issue is the most successful parties tend to be well financed. This is problematic for many indigenous organizations since they are a discriminated against group. Another issue is building alliances in Guatemala's Congress. Because parties come and go with ease, it is very difficult to build alliances for effecting policy.

This area of institutional research highlights the difficulties indigenous organizations face in Guatemala in their efforts to develop a Mayan political apparatus. While party formation might be a possibility for indigenous groups, it is hard to run a campaign nationwide. In addition, it would be tough to build any lasting alliances since party come and go with ease.

Other institutional scholars have more directly evaluated indigenous participation in Guatemala. They highlight how candidates can run as independents and not have to be attached to a political party (Hale 2002; McNeish 2008). These scholars also discuss the few successful cases of indigenous political leaders having success at the ballot box. One such case is Rigoberto Queme Chay in Quetzaltenango. He was elected mayor in 1995 and 1999 (Rasch 2011a; Copeland 2011). However, outside of Queme, there have been very few cases of indigenous politicians gaining elected political office.

Another trend in institutional research in regards to Guatemalan indigenous parties is to evaluate sub-national means of participating. One means through which the Mayan population in Guatemala participates is civic committees at the local level (Pallister 2013). Civic committees are short-term committees organizations can create to support a politician



for elected office. The advantage of these committees is they can be temporary, lasting through the electoral campaign and dissolved after the campaign. This institutional rule might be influential in Mayans not attempting to move past the local political level and build a nationwide political infrastructure because they have representation at the local level. In addition to civic committees, there is historic and present violence and discrimination against the Mayan population in Guatemala. This reality discourages Mayans from wanting to move past the local level of government (Pallister 2013).

### **Ethnopolitist Approach in Guatemala**

The ethnopolitist approach describes efforts in the 1970s by those in the Mayan movement to build a more cohesive and united political movement. However, this was prevented due to the Mayan population being targeted during Guatemala's civil war (Warren 2003). After the return of democracy in the 1980s, the Mayan movement was a crucial player in helping broker the agreement that ended the conflict in 1996. In spite of this success, the movement was not able to translate this unity into a viable political movement.

Madrid (2012) comments on the fact that with the Mayan movement having some unity, it would seem Guatemalan Mayans would have an opportunity to form a successful indigenous party. In his evaluation of Winaq, he critiques the fact its leadership has not followed the ethnopolitist model for winning political office. Winaq is led by Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rigoberta Menchu. She is known throughout Guatemala and especially in the Mayan community. However, she has not run Winaq like Evo Morales in Bolivia. She does make ethnic appeals along with being inclusive of Ladinos but does not make populist appeals. She does not make populist appeals in fear of upsetting the business community in Guatemala. In addition, she is not connected to the Mayan grassroots movement. Winaq is headquartered in Guatemala City, which is far removed from the center of the Mayan

community, which is located in the northern part of the country. Seemingly it appears that the ethnopopulist literature believes that if Menchu were to pursue a more ethnopopulist approach, Winaq would have more success.

Overall, the research on indigenous parties in Latin America is divided between institutional arguments and ethnopopulist arguments. This divide is also present in the literature on Guatemala. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the research will allow for better understanding of indigenous parties in Latin America and in Guatemala.

## **Research Design**

In the previous section, it was demonstrated the divide in the literature between institutional and ethnopopulist approaches to understanding indigenous party formation and success in Latin America and Guatemala. In the rest of this thesis I will show how both of these approaches miss important aspects of Mayan participation in Guatemala. The ethnopopulist approach misses many key factors about Mayan groups in Guatemala. It appears to make the assumption that if Winaq would only do what Evo Morales was able to do in Bolivia; it would then start to have more electoral success. This assumption is problematic because if a pure ethnopopulist approach would be a successful strategy then Winaq or some other indigenous party would have implemented it.

Institutionalists, on the other hand, show that institutions matters in the formation and success of indigenous parties in other countries in Latin America and could be a positive impact in Guatemala. However, what is missed in this approach is institutionalists are not looking at the right level of government. What needs to be evaluated are Mayan institutions at the local/village level of government. As I will demonstrate, there are numerous traditional institutions and divides within the Mayan community which leads to Mayans participating at the local level of government but not moving past it to build a

nationwide, pan-Mayan party. Looking at this level of government will allow for greater understanding of Mayan participation. Participation at the local level nullifies the assumption that Guatemala's indigenous population is not active politically.

The empirical section of this paper has two parts. First, I will run an empirical model with data from the 2012 LAPOP survey for Guatemala. This model closely follows Madrid's (2012) ethnopolitist model. The difference, however, is this model will test to see if support for a hypothetical indigenous candidate is along the lines of an ethnopolitist approach. Then, I will demonstrate how Mayans participate at the local/village level of government through traditional and modern institutions. In addition, I will show how divisions within Mayan ethnic identity also play a role in the struggle to build a successful pan-Mayan party.

## **Hypothesis**

The hypothesis I will be testing is:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Voters with an indigenous identity are more likely to support an indigenous party or leader in Guatemala than those who are Mestizo or speak Spanish as their mother language*

To test for this hypothesis, this paper will run multiple models to see if there are similar mechanisms in Guatemala compared to what Madrid has hypothesized should happen for a successful indigenous party. This paper will run similar models for Guatemala but will have different independent variables due to some questions asked in the Bolivia survey that were not asked in the Guatemalan one. The motivation for testing this hypothesis is to see if there is demand for an indigenous leader by the indigenous population. Failure to falsify this hypothesis will mean that there is not demand for an indigenous leader by the indigenous population.

## **Dependent Variables**

This paper uses the 2012 LAPOP survey data in the analysis. From the survey, I use two questions for the dependent variables for the two models. The first dependent variable is derived from the question, "Would you vote for an indigenous person for president?" This question is asking what this paper wants to evaluate: vote for an indigenous party/candidate. In the original questionnaire, the question is coded as "yes," "no," "no response," or "do not know." I have recoded it as a binary variable where a person would vote for an indigenous person for president is coded as 1 and a person who would not vote for an indigenous person for president is coded as 0. For this model, I run an ordinary logit.

In addition, I run a second model with a dependent variable derived from the question asking citizens if they think dark skinned leaders, referring to indigenous people, would make good political leaders. The original question from the survey is, "In general, people with dark skin are not good political leaders. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree, with this statement?" It is on a scale of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree. Because the variable is on a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, I run an ordered logit model.

The logic for running models with these dependent variables is to evaluate whether the results hold up across the survey. An issue both models have is a relatively low N. This is due to respondents not answering the questions that are the dependent variables. By running both, it can be seen if similar mechanisms hold up across the different models.

## **Independent Variables**

The key independent variables are identity, language, and support for indigenous education. Identity is coded as white, Ladino, indigenous, black, mulatto, or of another race. The reason for this variable is to evaluate whether there is a difference between the Ladino and indigenous populations of their support for an indigenous candidate. In the 2012

LAPOP data for Guatemala, most respondents said they were either Ladino or indigenous, indicative of a divide between the ladino and indigenous citizens within Guatemalan society.

Language is coded as Spanish, Mam, K'iche', Kaqchiquel, Q'eqchi', other native, or another foreign language. It is expected that those who speak an indigenous language are more likely to support an indigenous party or leader, consistent with what has been observed in Bolivia.

Indigenous education (or ieducation) is a variable asking respondents about opportunities for students of indigenous or dark-skin heritage and whether students from these backgrounds should have spots reserved for them at universities. This variable is coded on a scale from 1-7, with 1 being strongly disagree with that statement and 7 being strongly agree with the statement. The expectation is that those who would be more likely to support an indigenous party would be more likely to strongly agree with this statement. This question is meaningful because it indicates that people more accepting of indigenous participation in society at-large will be more likely to accept an indigenous political leader.

The other variables included in this analysis measure socio-economic and political ideology and participation, which are expected to have an effect on whether respondents support an indigenous party or leader. The variable for ideology is on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being left and 10 being right. While there is not an expectation that ideology will have a great impact on whether a person would support an indigenous party, if these indigenous parties do take a turn towards populism, it very well could. Using the rationale of Madrid's model for Bolivia, the protest variable is a yes or no to the question "Have you marched or demonstrated in a protest in the past 12 months?" I expect if respondents who protested to be more likely to be in favor of an indigenous party or leader. The trust in political parties is measured on a scale from 1 to 7, with a 1 being not at all and 7 being a lot of trust. I expect respondents who say they do not trust political parties to be more likely to support an

indigenous party. The trade meetings variable is another measure of the political participation of the respondents. This variable is measured on a scale from 1-4, with 1 being a respondent attends a meeting once a week and 4 being a respondent who never attends. It is not expected to see a relationship but simply another measure of political participation and ideology.

The last three variables are sex, age, and income. These variables are included as controls and I do not expect them to heavily influence support for an indigenous party. Sex is coded as female, where female respondents are coded as 1 and zero if male. Age in the data set simply takes the age of the respondent. The range of ages in the dataset is 17 to 89. Income is in 10 income brackets and ranges from no monthly income to monthly income over 10,000 quetzales.

## **Findings**

I use an ordinary logistic regression for the first dependent variable predicting whether a citizen would vote for an indigenous person for president and an ordered logistical regression in the second model with the dependent variable being coded as 1-4, asking whether an indigenous person would make a good political leader. For the ordinary logit model, there are mostly null results for the independent variables of the model. However, encouragingly, the variable for indigenous identity is statically significant at the 0.01 level and has a positive coefficient. This shows that those who identify as indigenous are more likely to support an indigenous candidate than not. The variable for language spoken shows that a couple of the indigenous language variables approach statistical significance at the 0.10 level. These results confirm part of the hypothesis that an indigenous identity will make a person more likely to support an indigenous political candidate. Speaking an indigenous language should have an effect on whether a person

would support an indigenous candidate but I cannot discern with certainty because of a low response rate.

[Table 1 Here]

To better understand the results of this model, I ran the odds ratio for the model. The odds ratio tells the odds of a person supporting an indigenous candidate for president if the respondent is indigenous. In this model, those who identify as indigenous are 2.25 times more likely to say they would support an indigenous candidate for president of Guatemala than if they were not indigenous. Those who spoke K'iche' at home as a child are 5.45 times more likely to say they would support an indigenous candidate for president. However, this variable approaches statistical significance at the 0.10 level. This shows speaking an indigenous language could have a positive effect if a survey with more indigenous language speakers could be conducted. Finally, the only other variable that is statistically significant is age. This is a negative coefficient and its odds ratio is .9828. These results means age has little to no effect on whether a person will support an indigenous candidate for president.

[Table 2 Here]

For the second model, it can be seen that the statistically significant variables are for those who identify as indigenous and the variable for income. The native language variable or the variable for support for indigenous education is not statistically significant, nor are other variables such as ideology or participation. However, when evaluating the predicted probabilities for the key independent variables, it is seen that those who identify as indigenous and speak an indigenous language are more likely to strongly disagree with the statement of whether they believe an indigenous person would make a bad leader.

Participants who identify as indigenous were 10.7 percent more likely to disagree with the statement that indigenous leaders make bad political leaders, holding all other variables constant. There is a similar finding when looking at differences between languages. The

change in the probability a person will strongly disagree with the statement an indigenous person would make a bad political leader increases by 3.4 percent moving from a Spanish speaker to an indigenous speaker, holding all other variables constant. This is seen across all indigenous languages. Indigenous speakers are more likely to strongly disagree with the statement than Spanish speakers. This is not surprising given that it's expected that indigenous people would be more likely to support an indigenous leader.

From these results, it can be concluded that there is some support for the hypothesis that indigenous people will be more likely to support an indigenous leader than those who are Ladino and those who speak Spanish. It does appear that there is some demand or at the very least some potential support for indigenous parties in Guatemala. However, some limitations of the data should be noted. There is an N of 462 for first model and an N of 425 for the second model. This is an issue because it is a very low response rate and means even more people gave no response or gave no answer than answered the question, and it lowers the predictive power of the model. While it did give the results discussed above, I am not able to make definite conclusions from both models because there is such a low N. Common remedies such as replacing missing responses with averages would be problematic given that over 50% of the variable would then be averages.

From these models, it appears that Guatemala does have some similar characteristics to other Latin American countries in that ethnicity and spoken language has an impact on voting behavior. In both models, identifying as an indigenous person and speaking an indigenous language makes a person more likely to vote for an indigenous person and party in Guatemala and less likely to say an indigenous person would make a bad political leader. The main issue is the low response rate for the question of whether citizens think that an indigenous person would make a bad political leader or not. Thus, I am able to conclude that there appears to be some evidence that the Maya population would



support an indigenous party in Guatemala and that the first hypothesis is not falsified by this admittedly limited data. The questions remain, however: why have political parties that attempt to represent the Maya, struggled to gain the support of the Maya population? Is there a desire for a successful pan-Maya party?

## **Other Explanations for a lack of a Pan-Maya Party**

The previous sections attempts to see if there is demand for an indigenous leader in Guatemala. The dependent variables for the two models asked if a citizen would vote for an indigenous person for president and whether they believe that a dark-skinned person would make a bad political leader. However, there was a low response rate for the dependent variables and key independent variables. In spite of this issue, I am able to determine that there appears to be some indigenous support for a hypothetical indigenous candidate for president or support a hypothetical indigenous leader. Even with the results of the logistic models, there is still a need to evaluate more in-depth the diversity of political participation in the Guatemalan Maya community. By evaluating political participation at the local level of government, it can be seen that there is a diversity of ways for the Maya population to participate. Participation at the local level demonstrates the label of failed case is not an accurate description of Guatemalan indigenous participation. I will now highlight three factors important to understanding how the Maya population participates: the “Cargo System”, civic committees, and divisions within the Maya community.

### **Cargo System**

One of the ways Maya participate at the local level in Guatemala is through the “Cargo System.” The “Cargo System” is an institution put into place during Spanish rule and is a system of community service. This community service system expects the men of a village to perform three acts of community service without reimbursement. (Rasch 2011a;

Ekern 2011) These acts can be of a civil or religious nature. Historically, this system would help in the ranking of members of the community and attempts to include all members of the community. In turn, political positions such as the council of elders are based on one's participation in the Cargo System. The council of elders in villages are the ones who act as administrators for civil and religious affairs. This system of elder leadership was banned in 1987 in Totonicapán due to a logging scandal and led to mistrust in the elders and has been in decline in other towns in K'iche' Guatemala like Santa Maria (Ekern 2011; Rasch 2011a). This led to the opening up of the cargo system to make it more democratic but the community service aspect of the "Cargo System" is still in use today (Ekern 2011). Even with its decline, the Cargo System is still influential in how leaders are selected, even with the process being democratic.

In spite of the continuing importance of the Cargo System, there is a divide within the Mayan community over the continuation of traditions like the Cargo System. This divide is between those who want village politics to be concentrated on the community as a whole against those who want to be treated more as individuals (Rasch 2011a; Ekern 2011). Those who want a more community based politics tend to be older and want to maintain traditional village institutions whereas the younger generations are moving towards a more western style of politics, where the concentration is on the individual. This move away from the Cargo System and traditional institutions by younger generations is their attempt to interact with the Guatemalan state as individuals and not through indigenous institutions or identity.

### **Civic Committees**

Another means through which the Maya participate are through civic committees. Civic committees are a way of organization in Guatemala that allows groups to form a committee to support a candidate for public office without having to form a political party.

These committees have become a popular tool for indigenous groups at the local level to support candidates for office without having to put the resources required to form a political party. The use of civic committees has been a popular tool among Maya activists (Pallister 2013; McNeish 2008; Hale 2002). Driving the use of civic committees is the fact many mainstream political parties ignore indigenous issues. Thus, at the local level, Maya groups find forming civic committees is one way to have their voices heard.

Maya groups have had some success electing Maya/indigenous candidates to political office. The greatest success occurred in 2003, where civic committees helped win 27 mayoralties (Pallister 2013). A case where civic committees have had significant success is in Quetzaltenango. The success in Quetzaltenango is profound because Quetzaltenango is the second largest city in Guatemala and is the unofficial capital of K'iche' Maya. The political organization and its civic committee, Xel-ju, supported Rigerberto Queme Chay for mayor of Quetzaltenango in the 1990s and early 2000s. Queme was elected mayor in 1995 and 1999 and lost in the 2004 election (Rasch 2011b).

Xel-ju was founded as a Mayan organization in the 1970s. Influencing the decision to form as a Maya political organization was the motivation to gain political office at the local level for the Maya community in Guatemala, especially in the Quetzaltenango area. It has been primarily concentrated in Quetzaltenango and represents mostly K'iche' Maya. Since its founding in the 1970s, Xel-ju, has walked a fine line to not incur the wrath of the military during Guatemala's civil war and to help in negotiating the recognition of indigenous rights in Quetzaltenango.

Because Xel-ju is an indigenous organization, they make efforts to recruit indigenous candidates for political office (Rasch 2011b). However, Xel-ju struggled to gain political office and this eventually led to a decision by the organization to also include Ladinos in the organization. By becoming more inclusive of Ladinos, this helped lead to

success for Xel-ju in the 1990s. In the 1995 campaign for mayor of Quetzaltenango, Xel-ju ran Maya and Ladino candidates and also used both Maya and Ladino imagery and symbols (Rasch 2011b). Using this approach, Xel-ju led by Queme was able to gain power in Quetzaltenango in 1995 and 1999.

However, making Xel-ju a more inclusive organization caused divisions that proved to be its undoing by the mid2000s. Even when Queme won reelection in 1999, there was already a division within the organization (Rasch 2001b; Rasch 2011c). The division came from those within the organization who wanted Xel-ju to be focus solely on the indigenous populations, not the inclusive route Queme and others were taking the organization. In addition, there were criticisms such as Queme was including allowing Ladinos in the running of the organization and subsequent corruption and scandals shortly after Queme allowed Ladinos more say within the organization. Other criticisms of Queme's multicultural approach was to make Xel-ju more democratic and opened up politics for the indigenous population that is more rural and poorer. Many within Xel-ju found this to be problematic because this population did not necessarily identify as Maya and including groups other than Maya ran contrary to what the founding members of Xel-ju wanted the organization to be.

The divisions within Xel-ju were problematic for Queme during his second campaign for mayor. In spite of these divisions, he was able to overcome these issues and win a second term in 1999. However, in the 2004 election, Xel-ju was a distant fourth and it has not achieved the level of success compared to when Queme was in office. To date, Xel-ju has been the most successful indigenous organization in Guatemala that has made use of civic committees.

## **Inter-Maya Divisions**

Along with different means of participating, there are divisions within the Maya/indigenous community. There are divisions along linguist lines, divisions between different Mayan groups, and divisions along class lines. These divisions are often times brushed aside when explaining indigenous political activities in Guatemala. Scholars seemingly treat the Maya as a homogenous group. In reality, the divisions within the Maya community are deep enough that assuming the Maya are one, unified groups leads to missing key divisions which can help understand Maya political participation (Vogt 2015; Ekern 2011; Rasch 2011b; Rasch 2011c).

Many scholars do not take into account the divisions within the indigenous/Mayan community in Guatemala due to the success the Mayan movement has had over the past few decades. The Mayan movement developed later due to Guatemala's civil war and pursued organizational goals differently because of its experience during the war. During the 1970s, groups within the Mayan Movement began pursuing political routes for advancing indigenous goals. However, these actions were met with violence and have influenced the movement's actions to the present (Warren 2003). This has led to the Mayan Movement to concentrate more upon the recognition of indigenous rights and preservation of indigenous culture than building a pan-Mayan party. These rights were recognized in the peace accords that ended the civil war (Yashar 2005; Warren 1998). However, these reforms were put to a vote that included language recognizing indigenous rights in the constitution and were defeated in a low-turnout vote.

While the Mayan Movement has experienced some success in gaining indigenous rights in Guatemala, the movement has stagnated in recent years and still is not a significant player in Guatemalan national politics. Part of this reason is due the significant ethnic, linguistic, and cultural divisions within the Mayan community. There are over 20 different

Mayan language groups (Vogt 2015). One attempt to unify the Mayan Movement into a cohesive political movement regardless of Mayan groups is Rigoberta Menchu's Winaq party. However, as discussed earlier, she has not been successful and the Mayan community remains very fractured.

When evaluating where the indigenous population has had the most success politically in Guatemala, it has predominately been within K'iche' speaking regions. Ribgoberta Menchu and leaders of the Xel-ju organization are K'iche' and Quetzaltenango is considered to be the capital of K'iche' Mayas. Other Mayan linguistic groups concentrate more upon culture and linguistic education and preservation than on running for political office (Hale 2002; Bastos and Camus 2006).

Along with differences between different Mayan linguistic groups, there are differences within linguistic groups. Many of the issues that has hampered the Xel-ju organization after 1999 can be traced to differences within the K'iche' Maya community. When Rigoberto Queme Chay became the mayor of Quetzaltenango, one of the policies he implemented included building roads to the rural areas outside of the city limits of Quetzaltenango and participatory democracy institutions (Rasch 2011b; Rasch 2011c). The goal of these policies was to open up politics of Quetzaltenango to these rural populations to politics and to build an indigenous way to conduct politics.

However, there is quite a difference between the indigenous populations that live in urban Quetzaltenango and those who live in the surrounding rural areas. The indigenous population that lives in the rural areas tends to identify as indigenous rather than Mayan and these populations also tend to be poorer (Rasch 2011b; Rasch 2011c). Those who identify as Mayan tend to be urban and middle class. This divide could be seen in the divisions within Xel-ju. Many within the organization were upset with Queme spending resources to implement the policies of road building and direct democracy. The criticisms

were by those who wanted to keep Xel-ju as a more indigenous organization rather than open it up and make it more multicultural. As a result of this divide within the K'iche' community in Quetzaltenango, Xel-ju was able to gain office for its candidates on municipal councils and elect Queme as mayor in 1995 and 1999. In subsequent elections, Xel-ju only partially pursued the votes of the excluded indigenous and Ladino populations and was a factor in Xel-ju becoming a less relevant political play in Quetzaltenango.

Thus, simply classifying Guatemala as a 'failed' case is simplistic and likely a false classification. A more accurate view of how Mayans are participating politically is to look at the diversity of their institutions at the local level and divisions in identity that is observed within the Mayan community. Part of this concentration on the local level for participating is due to historical violence and discrimination. However, not taking into account the differences within the Mayan community, leads to assumptions about the Mayan community that is problematic. Future research in this area of Mayan politics will need to take these factors into account in order to get a more holistic view of Mayan politics.

## **Conclusion**

Overall this paper evaluates why a pan-Mayan party has not developed on the level seen in other Latin American countries. First, I ran model a model based upon what Madrid (2012) has said is the path for an indigenous party to gain mass support. In the second half of my empirical section, I demonstrated that Mayans do participate politically but concentrate on local and traditional institutions. In addition, divisions within the Mayan community are a factor that prevents any mobilization outside of the local level. I am able to conclude that while a pan-Mayan has not developed, this does not mean Guatemala is a "failed case" but demonstrates how diverse the Mayan politically community is.

The diversity of political institutions seen in the Mayan community presents numerous routes for future research could take. One route would be to begin taking survey of the different traditional institutions in place in Mayan villages. This would require extensive fieldwork and interviews with leaders in these villages. However, to begin to better understand these traditional institutions, there is a need to observe how they actually work.

Another area of future research could take is evaluating gender differences within the Mayan community. Van Cott (2010a) speaks about the need to evaluate the intersection of ethnicity and gender. Within the Mayan community, there is still a view females can only participate if they finish their other duties, such as childrearing (Ekern 2011). Understanding how females within the Mayan community have or have not overcome traditional roles would give a more holistic view of the entire Mayan community participates.

Building off the need to evaluate groups who are excluded in the Mayan community, is the need to evaluate the democratic nature of traditional institutions (Van Cott 2010a). This thesis has demonstrated how Mayans in Guatemala are participating at the local level rather than attempting to build a nationwide pan-Mayan party. A fair question to ask is whether these tradition institutions are democratic and inclusive of all members of the Mayan community.

Overall, future research on Mayan political participation could take many different paths. There is a need to evaluate these traditional and local institutions. More than anything there is a need to understand more in-depth how the Guatemalan Mayan community participates politically.



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## Appendix

	Coefficient (S.E.)	Odds Ratio  (S.E)
Mam Maternal Language	0.66 (.578)	1 (empty)
K'iche Language	-.660 (.407)	5.4620 (1.0549)
Other Native Language	-.375 (.495)	3.5692 (1.0687)
Kaqchiquel Language	1.186 (.6848)	.6139 (.7194)
Q'eqchi' Language	-.0003 (.605)	.9209 (.6975)
Indigenous Identity	1.132*** (.266)	2.2379 (.3160)
Other Identity	-1.597 (1.591)	1
Ideology	-.048 (.044)	1.0768 (.0514)
Protest	.103 (.364)	.8086 (.5237)
Trust	-.093 (.064)	1.0048 (.0766)
Trade	.164 (.151)	1.1354 (.1577)
Indigenous Uni. Spot	-.051 (.058)	1.0401 (.0693)
Sex	.251 (.208)	.8096 (.2498)
Age	.001** (.007)	.9828 (.0079)
Urban	.311 (.216)	1.1164 (.2631)
Income	.111 (.029)	.9879 (.0332)
N	462	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.0768	

**Figure 1: Would you vote for an indigenous person for president? with Odds Ratios**

P > .10\* P>.05\*\* P>.01\*\*\*

	Coefficient (S.E.)	P> z
Mam Maternal Language	0.66 (.578)	0.909
K'iche Language	-.660 (.407)	0.108
Other Native Language	-.375 (.495)	0.234
Kaqchiquel Language	1.186 (.6848)	0.498
Q'eqchi' Language	-.0003 (.605)	0.906
Indigenous Identity	1.132 (.266)	0.000
Other Identity	-1.597 (1.591)	0.316
Ideology	-.048 (.044)	0.150
Protest	.103 (.364)	0.685
Trust	-.093 (.064)	0.950
Trade	.164 (.151)	0.421
Indigenous Uni. Spot	-.051 (.058)	0.571
Sex	.251 (.208)	0.398
Age	.001 (.007)	0.027
Urban	.311 (.216)	0.676
Income	.111 (.029)	0.713
N	462	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.0768	

**Table 2: Would a dark skinned person make a bad political leader?**

P > .10\* P>.05\*\* P>.01\*\*\*