

# When Globalization Amplifies Identity Formation

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*The Rise of Indigenous Environmental Concerns in Latin America*

## **Abstract**

Indigenous people in Latin America have formed formidable coalitions and gained political power in the last few decades, but many people forget that some indigenous groups have had contentious histories spanning several hundred years. How were indigenous groups able to overcome past differences to construct a unifying “indigenous” identity, and why now? I tackle the question of identity (re)construction using the Dynamic Model of Contentious Politics, by McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly (2001) and social identity theory (SIT). I argue that disparate indigenous groups saw themselves as falling under an umbrella group of “indigenous” because of a psychological shift in how these groups socially identify themselves. This shift was facilitated by globalization, which presented indigenous groups with new threats, like environmental exploitation, but also with new tools, especially technology, to construct a different social identity. Learning about indigenous identity formation is significant for understanding political power gains for non-dominant groups and the current social developments in Latin America.

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# **When Globalization Amplifies Identity Formation: The Rise of Indigenous Environmental Concerns in Latin America**

## **1. Indigenous Contention in Latin American**

Governments in Latin America historically have granted indigenous people limited recognition. Only recently have indigenous people gained significant political, economic, and social rights. They won these rights, in part, by overcoming tribal differences and acknowledging a common identity, which allowed them to unite into a formidable political force. For some analysts, a coalition of indigenous groups seems like a logical partnership. They point to indigenous groups' common needs and lack of rights as unifying factors. However, indigenous groups have rivalries that span hundreds of years. After so much intergroup fighting and emphasis on dissimilarities rather than commonalities, how have indigenous people managed to overcome their historical grievances and ethnic differences to forge a common "indigenous" identity?

In this paper, I tackle the question of identity (re)construction using a model from contentious politics. The Dynamic Model of Contentious Politics, by McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly (2001), captures much of the story of indigenous identity formation, but it does not encompass the full picture. Missing from the model are hypotheses about the micro-foundations of identity change and transformation. To fill this gap, I draw on arguments from social identity theory (SIT). I argue that disparate indigenous groups saw themselves as falling under an umbrella group of "indigenous" because of a psychological shift in how these groups socially identify themselves. This shift was facilitated by globalization, which

presented indigenous groups with new threats but also with new tools, especially technology, to construct a different social identity. The main contribution of my paper is a model that synthesizes aspects from Contentious Politics with aspects of SIT to explain how different ethnic groups redefine their group identification, highlighting places where effects from globalization served as a catalyzing force. This synthesized model will allow us to understand the dynamic of future social movements where actors can unify for a cause despite starting off with major identity differences. Indigenous groups in Latin America have differences and rivalries that have span hundreds of years, making their ability to collaborate for a common cause especially informative for this research agenda.

I begin with a brief discussion about contentious politics. Contentious politics is relevant in that it deals with social mobilization, which necessarily pools people of different backgrounds into one, mobilizing force. Second, I present my theory on why indigenous identity has grown in Latin America. Third, I briefly discuss indigenous populations in Latin America: their diversity, historically acrimonious relationships, collaborative efforts, and finally their growing political achievements. Fourth, I present three diverse cases of indigenous struggles against oil drilling, cattle ranchers, and dam builders as examples of how the formation of new social identities has come about. The final section of my paper will draw conclusions about the significance of indigenous social identity formation for the study of development in Latin America.

## **2. A Dynamic Model of Contention**

According Beteille (1998), in an article in the *Journal of Current Anthropology*, a group is “indigenous” when “...there are other populations in the same region that can

reasonably be described as settlers or aliens. A significant dimension of the identity of the population correctly designated as 'indigenous' derives from a particular history of settlement and usurpation (p. 188)." The United Nations (UN) has not adopted an official definition for "indigenous," but it has a list of typical characteristics of indigenous people, which includes: historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; distinct language, culture and beliefs; and members of non-dominant groups in a society (Chakrabarti, 2015). Both Beteille and the UN's definitions recognize the longevity of indigenous cultures, that they are natives of a place but now live on land largely governed by another population that came later and settled there, and that they form the non-dominant groups of society.

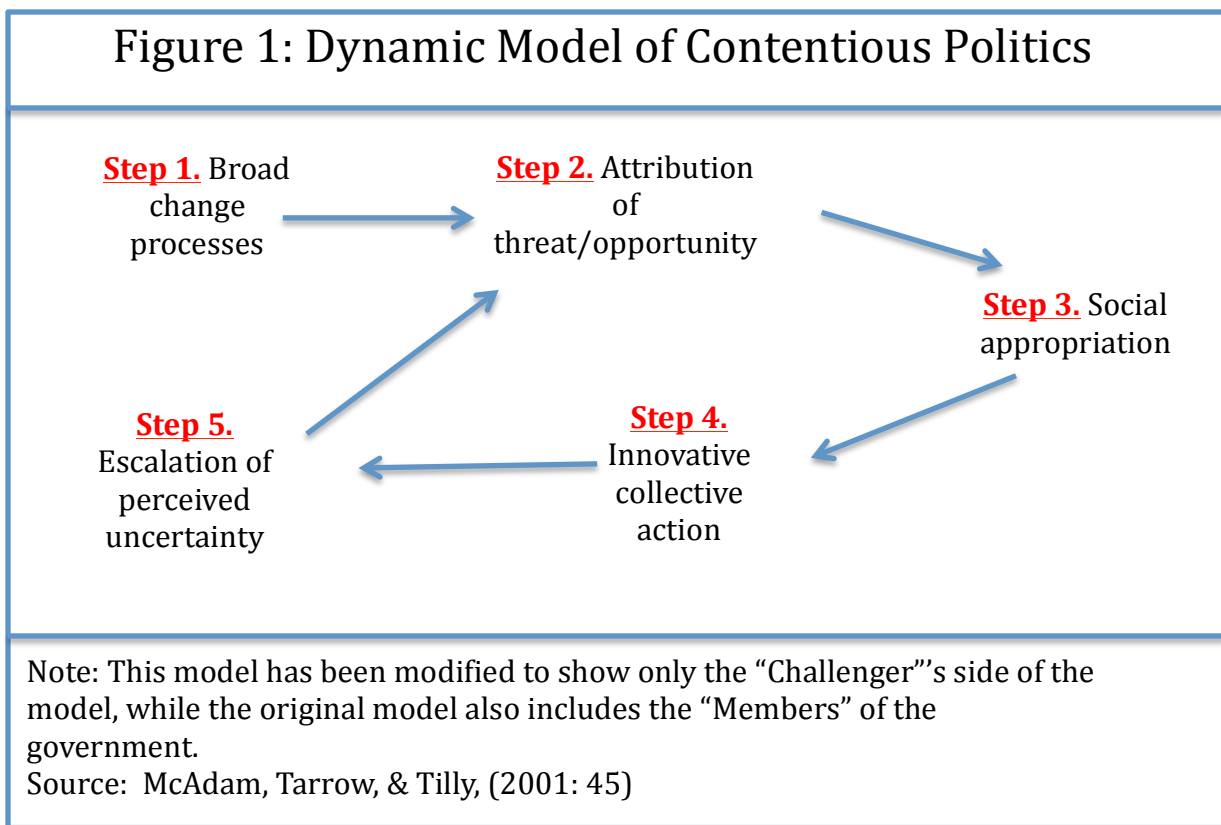
The deceptive aspect of these definitions is that they form a blanket category for all peoples who fit these criteria and emphasize their commonalities. These definitions, however, overlook the fact that people who can be considered as indigenous under these definitions may not necessarily categorize themselves in the same group as another indigenous group. This problem is similar to how Asians and Hispanics can be lumped together as "minorities" in the United States, but these two groups do not see themselves as belonging to the same social group much of the time. Indeed, many indigenous groups are still fighting each other over territory, resources, and many other reasons. The Aztecs, who inhabited parts of Mexico in the 1400s up to the Spanish presence in the early 1500s, purposely pitched indigenous groups living under their rule against each other in order to keep them divided and weak (Scarritt, 2008). Indigenous groups have typically seen themselves as being separate from other indigenous groups. Despite this long history of separateness, the puzzle is that they are now forming similar identities and seeing

themselves in the same group as other indigenous groups, even banding together and cooperating to fight for indigenous political rights.

To answer this question, I look at the literature on social movements because many instances of indigenous unification occur during times of resistance. The literature on Latin America typically posits that social movements arise as a reaction against economic changes that threaten to terminate their current mode of living. For example, under policies of privatization, Latin American peasants have risen up against large agribusinesses that moved into their areas (Vergara-Camus, 2013; Gunderson, 2015). A specific branch of literature under social movements is that of contentious politics, and this offers some explanatory insights. McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly (2001) define contentious politics as “all situations in which actors make collective claims on other actors, claims which, if realized, would affect the actors’ interests, when some government is somehow party to the claims.” Other contentious politics literature also assumes social uprising against the government, such as the Arab Spring movement against the Egyptian government (El Mahdi, 2009) or the Chinese pro-democracy movement (O’Brien & Li, 2005). According to the contentious politics model, conflicts occur between a government entity and a challenger entity.

Contentious politics is relevant to indigenous identity formation because it studies processes of social uprising where no formal channel for resistance exists, which is the situation that many indigenous groups face. The dynamic begins when broad change processes take place, as in the case of market reforms imposed by governments in the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America (Figure 1, Step 1). Such changes create a situation that is

perceived as threatening to a given group, which can in turn seize this as an opportunity (Figure 1, Step 2). Next, there is social appropriation, wherein certain group members use this idea and make it more widespread (Figure 1, Step 3). This leads to innovative collective action (Figure 1, Step 4). An escalation of perceived uncertainty follows (Figure 1, Step 5), which can further contribute to a sense of threat or opportunity (Figure 1, Step 2).



McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly’s model involves both “Members” of the government and “Challengers” who are non-governmental actors, operating in a dual-track but also influencing each other. I reproduce in Figure 1 below only the process from the “Challenger” side because my actors of interest are non-governmental.

There are some aspects of this model that do not transpose well to indigenous movements. First, indigenous struggles are not always against a governmental entity; sometimes they are against multinational corporations or encroaching domestic businesses (Hochstetler & Keck, 2007; Cevallos, 2007). Second, the contentious politics literature assumes that groups already view themselves as united under the same political system, and they are thus fighting together to reform that system. Many indigenous groups, however, operate under their own local political system, so they may be rising up against the same political regime or against a different threat. Third, McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly's model does not talk about how actors come to see themselves in a common or similar light. Contentious politics speaks about the mobilization of those who already have much in common and see themselves as having much in common with others. The model overlooks those who see themselves as different, and sometimes, in rivalry with others, but can also put aside that identity with a larger group for the same cause. Thus, the model of contentious politics lacks a microfoundation that explains how those who see themselves as being very different from each other can begin to view themselves as being quite similar. Because of these differences, I integrate social identity theory (SIT) into the contentious politics model to explain indigenous identity formation.

### **3. Social Identity Theory (SIT)**

There is much theorizing about identity formation in the psychology literature. How historically disparate groups were able to categorize themselves as common actors has much to do with how they perceive their identity. Identity consists of one's own perception of oneself, which is individual identity, and one's perception of oneself in relation to others,



which is social identity. Weaver (2001) adds the term external identity, which is the identity that others have with regard to a given actor or set of actors.

SIT captures the dynamic of intergroup and intragroup interaction. It states that people categorize their world because it serves as a heuristic device for understanding how their world functions. These categories facilitate decisions and actions because people do not have to relearn everything about their world in each instance. Categories also lend structure to an otherwise chaotic world. Not only do people categorize external factors, they also self-categorize by placing themselves into groups (Bodenhausen & Bauer, 2007). Because people are complex and multifaceted, they can belong to an infinite number of groups. In other words, they can categorize themselves in an infinite number of ways. Different categories rise or fall in importance depending on the context. Peoples' social identity is dynamic and responsive to contextual factors, where different contexts can prescribe different appropriate behavior (Hogg, et. al, 1995).

Once a group is formed, in-group/out-group biases can be observed, and the obvious tendency is to favor in-group members. This does not mean that there are automatic feelings of animosity towards members of the out-group, but in-group members are more likely to help their in-group over out-group members (Mercer, 1995). This can inadvertently harm out-group members, especially in situations where resources are finite. If an in-group member consumes a resource, this means less of this resource is available for an out-group member, resulting in a zero-sum game.

Evolutionists argue that in-group favoritism occurs because it encourages survival. First, favoritism makes people enjoy staying in the group, which increases survival. Second, the increase in the number of people in the group also increases power. Third, the altruism

of others toward an in-group member makes that member avoid in-group duty-shirking or free-riding. Fourth, because in-group members expect that others within that in-group will help them, they will be altruistic towards in-group members as well (Spears, 2007).

To be clear, in-group bias is not just a matter of rational self-interest; it also provides symbolic and emotional benefits to the group. The benefits of being in the in-group entice members who are not in the in-group to want to join that group. People also tend to think more favorably toward their in-group because it increases their self-esteem (Gramzow, 2007). Another piece of evidence for the survival argument is the fact that in-group fighting is not often observed (although competition for hierarchical power is present) (Spears, 2007). Out-group bias, or the tendency to favor out-group members over in-group members, can obviously occur, but this is much less common.

SIT holds that group identity can be formed easily and arbitrarily, but there must be some common factor at a given point in time for people to grasp in order for them to co-identify as being in the same group. Moreover, this commonality must exist and be brought to the forefront in order to ignite this aspect of one's identity. For indigenous groups in Latin America, I argue that their direct reliance on natural resources, such as access to land, water, and minerals, for survival was the commonality that united them. Although they relied on natural resources throughout their history, neoliberal policies, such as free markets, capitalism, and opening up markets to international businesses in the 1970s and 1980s took a toll on once bountiful resources and forced indigenous groups to respond. Conflicts have manifested themselves as pockets of resistance when outside forces encroached on indigenous lands, and these conflicts still occur to this day. When conflicts over these resources with the state and/or international corporations actors, the

commonality of relying on natural resources was brought to the fore and became the stimulus for forging a stronger group identity. This has resulted in a new alliance of indigenous peoples whose level of collaboration has been unprecedented. Globalization is the backdrop against which this transformation has occurred.

In the following section, I synthesize some facets of contentious politics and SIT into one model meant to explain the identity formation of indigenous groups in Latin America, while also adding globalization into the mixture. My proposal models how indigenous people of different tribes, viewing themselves as quite different and not sharing a common culture or language, can redefine their identity and see themselves as being part of a common group.

#### **4. A Dynamic Model of Indigenous Identity Formation Under Environmental Threats**

Many indigenous groups rely on local natural resources for their subsistence. Although conflicts over scarce resources have occurred in the past, these were on a small scale and localized. The antagonists were other tribes, out-groups that competed with other groups in consuming finite common resources. The in-group/out-group distinction remained at the tribal level and kept the different groups divided.

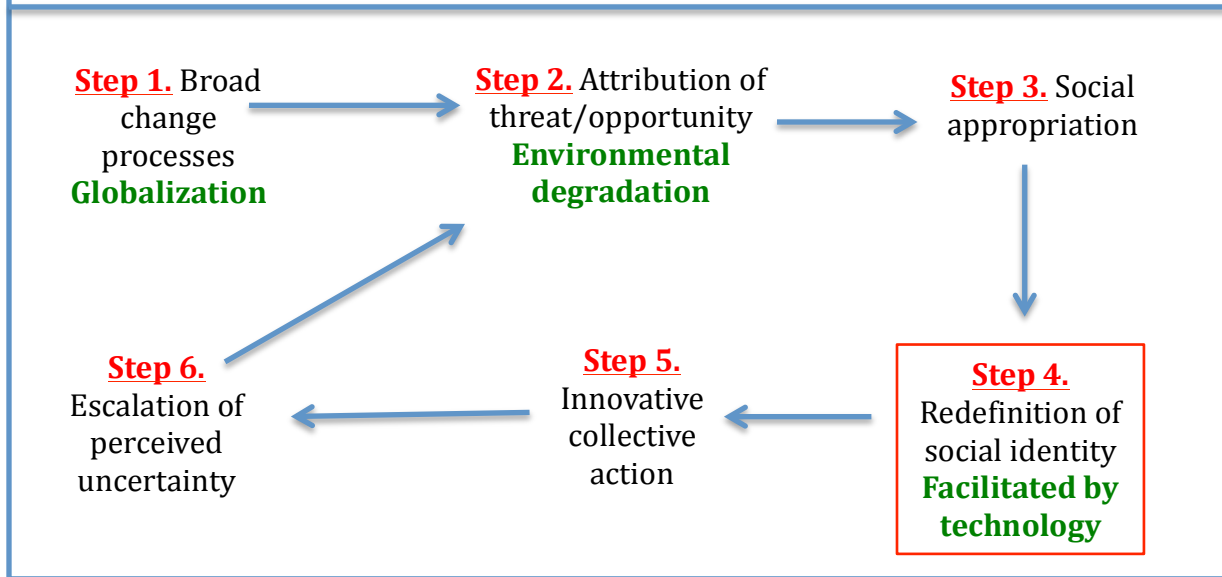
I argue that an indigenous identity developed because these groups have changed how they socially categorize themselves. In the past, tribal identification used to be their most salient identity. According to SIT, group members tend to feel favorably toward others within the in-group and to forge their identity at the tribal level. Those outside of the tribe were thus considered out-group members and were viewed less favorably. When

Latin American countries adopted neoliberal policies and integrated more with the international market in the 1970s and 1980s, essentially globalizing itself, it opened itself up to a host of new forces. Globalization introduced a new external threat - resource scarcity and environmental degradation - into the boundaries of indigenous groups, which brought a different characteristic of their identity to the surface. While tribal identification used to be their most salient identity, the characteristic of being common victims with nearby tribes gained in importance and became the new in-group reference point. Expansion of the in-group membership allowed for improved inter-tribal relations. Ironically, another element of globalization, the dissemination of technology, facilitated communication between groups about issues, threats, and the need to mobilize.

I show where this step occurs in Figure 2 below, which is a modified model of Figure 1 that includes the social identity changes. The model begins with broad social change, including globalization and the opening up of the economy (Figure 2, Step 1). Next, there is a threat to indigenous peoples, which includes environmental harm and land degradation as multinational corporations come to extract resources or take over land that is already inhabited by indigenous peoples (Figure 2, Step 2). This leads to an appropriation by some of the leaders of the indigenous communities of this threat as their own threat. They inform others in their community about this external threat, and this news reaches tribes, who, although belonging to different groups, also face the same threat (Figure 2, Step 3). At this point, the common threat becomes the forefront feature of their identity, and their differences, although still existent, fade into the background. This is where SIT theory comes into play, and there is a transformation in the understanding of a group's relational identity vis-a-vis others. While before other indigenous tribes were part of the out-group,

the shared threat of external resource extractors has shifted them into the in-group. Technology, another feature of globalization, such as Skype, smart phones, the Internet, radio, and simple face-to-face communication enable these groups to quickly spread their message (Figure 2, Step 4). This then leads to innovative action, such as protesting by rubber tappers in Brazil or blockading streets to demand more rights, as in Bolivia and Peru (Figure 2, Step 5). This then leads to an escalation of the threat (Figure 2, Step 6), which can cycle back to the attribution of the intrusion of a foreign entity as a threat (Step 2). Globalization wrought the changes that allowed for foreign entities, such as oil companies, to connect with other markets and extract resources, but it also provides the technology and networks that allow for the amplification of identity formation among indigenous groups. In Figure 2, I highlight in green where globalization forces occur, and I put a red box around Step 4, which is where the social identity transformation takes place.

Figure 2: Social Identity Model of Contentious Politics



A main factor that unified these groups was that they all depended on the land and natural environment for survival, and both were threatened by outside forces. Jose del Val, head of the Mexico Multicultural Nation University Program and former director of the Inter-American Indigenous Institute, states, "If we compare a map of the region that shows where indigenous people live with another [map] that shows the planet's last unexploited natural resources, it turns out that they fully coincide. That is the reality -- and the tragedy (Cevallos, 2007)." With the state and major corporations intruding, they have the ability to alter the environment in a major way. Because their livelihood depends on the environment, it is a priority issue common to the many affected indigenous groups. This commonality becomes a unifying feature that underlines the similarities between these indigenous groups, overriding their differences and paving the way for a common indigenous identity to emerge.

Globalization introduced a new out-group -- non-indigenous environmental exploiters -- making it necessary for indigenous peoples to band together to ensure the

survivability of their people. Latin American governments loosened up their markets for domestic and international trade significantly in the 1970s and 1980s, opening up opportunities for businessmen that had not existed before. These non-indigenous environmental exploiters were different because they did not depend on the environment to survive. They were there to do business and turn a profit, regardless of the environmental costs. They were also more powerful. If the outsiders succeeded in using the land as they wished, entire indigenous villages would not be able to continue their lives as they had in the past, and their existence would be jeopardized. Environmental dependency was a common thread that ran through all of these groups. The threat of lost access to resources united their identity at this crucial juncture. Conflicts arose wherever the environment or natural resources were greatly disturbed, and skirmishes continue to this day.

## **5. Indigenous Populations in Latin America**

This section provides a brief overview of the indigenous population in Latin America. Although an accurate count of the indigenous population is difficult because many live in remote areas, indigenous people are estimated to make up about 11% of Latin America's 540 million people. The majority of the population in Bolivia and Guatemala is indigenous, while significant numbers reside in Peru, Ecuador, Belize, Honduras, and Mexico (Van Cott, 2007). Figure 3 shows the estimated indigenous population in Latin American countries.

The countries in this table are ranked by the percentage of the population that is indigenous. Bolivia has the largest indigenous percentage, at 71%. Next is Guatemala, at

66%, and Peru at 47%. Many indigenous tribes still do not interact regularly with communities outside of their own, so these numbers are rough estimates and actual numbers can be much higher.

Figure 3: Estimated Indigenous Populations in Latin American Countries		
Country	Indigenous Population	Percent of Total
Bolivia	5,914,000	71
Guatemala	8,342,000	66
Peru	12,696,000	47
Ecuador	5,556,000	43
Belize	47,000	19
Honduras	938,000	15
Mexico	14,049,000	14
Chile	1,217,000	8
Guyana	56,000	8
El Salvador	429,000	7
Panama	168,000	6
Suriname	26,000	6
Nicaragua	241,000	5
Paraguay	168,000	3
Colombia	794,000	2
Venezuela	471,000	2
Costa Rica	36,000	1
Argentina	370,000	1
Brazil	332,000	0
Uruguay	1,000	0
Source: Van Cott (2007)		

Peru has over 12 million indigenous people, one of the largest concentrations of indigenous peoples in Latin America. However, they are seen as one of the weakest indigenous populations in all of Latin America. The percentage of indigenous people within a population does not seem to be a determining factor in terms of group mobilization. Guatemalan indigenous people make up 66% of its population, but they're typically not deemed as strong as Colombia's indigenous peoples, who make up only 2% of Colombia's population (Brysk, 2000).

The livelihood of these indigenous groups is that of subsistence on the surrounding natural resources. They can depend heavily on their immediate environment. Most are farmers, such as those in the Para State of Brazil. Some are hunter and gatherers, like most tribes in the Amazon. Some are vendors at small markets where they sell their crafts to



other tribes and to tourists. The Kayapo of Brazil, for example, make jewelry by gathering local seeds (Gonzalez-Perez, et al., 2013). This shows that many still live the hunter-gatherer lifestyle and are highly dependent on the land, whether it is subsistence farming or small local trades.

Indigenous peoples of Ecuador are one of the few groups that have been able to exploit capitalism, traveling internationally to sell “locally” crafted goods (sometimes the crafts were bought from other countries and marketed as originating from Ecuador) and spreading their music culture (Kyle, 2011). They have markets where each village specializes in a certain kind of good, such as hats, or shirts. They usually cater to tourist tastes. They have received international renown for their Saturday textile markets (Clark & Becker, 2007), and have thus enjoyed a better living standard than most other indigenous groups (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2003).

Ecuador’s case is exceptional, however. The vast majority of indigenous peoples in Latin America still rely heavily on the resources available within their local environment. The Uros people, who live in Lake Titicaca that lies on the border of Peru and Bolivia, live on islands made out of floating reeds that grow in the lake. They tie these reeds together to form a large swath of floating “land.” Because they live on these floating islands in the lake, they survive on fish they catch from the lake and trade with nearby neighbors. Many groups, like the Uros, survive from the consumption of animals and plants that grow in their immediate surroundings.

Those who identify as indigenous comprise an extremely heterogeneous group. Quechua speakers in Ecuador subdivide into seventeen distinct groups. The Amazon region

contains at least twelve indigenous nationalities. Colombia's indigenous population consists of eighty-one groups speaking sixty-four languages. Indigenous peoples also live in widely different geographic regions, ranging from the coast, to jungles, to mountains and high plains (Van Cott, 2007). Because of their diversity, it is difficult to generalize about their cultures.

Before their contact with European settlers, indigenous groups viewed themselves as distinct from other groups (Weaver, 2001). Not only did their differences set them apart from other tribes, certain political leaders purposefully created discord among these groups in order to sustain cleavages. The Aztecs were notorious for inciting animosity between groups in order to subjugate all under their rule. Their disunity has also been cited as one of the reasons why the Aztecs were so easily conquered when the Spaniards encountered them in the New World (Scarritt, 2008). To sum up, indigenous groups in Latin America have had a long history of viewing other groups as part of the out-group, to be treated with hostility and suspicion.

Increasingly, however, conflicts have shifted from inter-tribal to strife against larger forces such as the national government and international companies. Jose del Val, cited above, further commented:

"If states do not recognize the territorial rights of indigenous people and if exploitation of resources in their areas of settlement continues to advance swiftly, we will have major conflicts in the next 10 years, and many indigenous communities on the brink of cultural extinction could disappear. What should happen over the next decade is recognition of the fact that the resources found in indigenous territories belong to the indigenous people. Thus, if the state and transnational corporations want to do business, they have to become partners with the indigenous communities. But this isn't happening anywhere." (Cevallos, 2007)

Conflicts between indigenous peoples and their government and transnational

corporations have clearly grown. People now fear that exploitation from external actors will lead to the extinction of indigenous groups in the near future. Not only is resource exploitation a perceived threat, it is an actual threat to their livelihoods.

Rising up against perceived injustice from multiple directions, indigenous peoples began to coalesce in the 1970s. At this time, indigenous social movements arose in Mexico and Argentina in defense of land rights. In the 1980s, international actors and donors began helping indigenous groups to form national-level organizations. By the 1990s, large networks had developed, which allowed for mass mobilization and protests (Van Cott, 2007). Over the years, indigenous groups have expanded their agenda to include a range of issues, such as bilingual education, resource rights and access, political representation, and environmental protection.

Their struggles have resulted in some changes. In Colombia, for example, indigenous people elected three-dozen municipal councilors in 1991, then one governor, eleven mayors, and 200 municipal councilors in 1997. The Pachakutick Movement of Plurinational Unity in Ecuador ran candidates in the 1996 legislative election and joined the 2002 coalition to elect President Lucio Gutierrez. In Bolivia, the Movement to Socialism (MAS)'s candidate, Evo Morales, won the presidency with 53.7% of the votes in 2006 and became the first indigenous president of the country. Venezuela's United Multiethnic People of the Amazon (PUAMA) won a state-level office in 1998 and elected a representative to the Constituent Assembly in 1999 (Van Cott, 2007). Thus, indigenous groups have made political progress and gained rights throughout Latin America. Although indigenous groups from some countries, such as Peru and Guatemala, have been viewed as less politically assertive, others have been highly effective, most notably those in Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador,

Nicaragua, and Bolivia (Brysk, 2000). To summarize, indigenous groups have historically been in conflict with each other, but some groups have been successful at unifying a large number of different tribes and even gaining political influence in their national government.

## **6. Case Studies**

In this section, I will discuss three cases that demonstrate the successful mobilization around environmental issues. Gerring (2007) identifies nine different types of case study that are helpful in hypotheses testing. One type is the diverse case, which compares cases that vary on multiple variables, to see whether the hypothesis still holds across these cases. I will look at three diverse cases to see whether my theory that globalization amplifies indigenous environmental concerns and identity in Latin America holds. The one common feature among the cases is that the issue at hand is an environmental one, but the cases range in geography (Ecuador, Brazil, and Peru), by environmental issue (oil exploration, deforestation, and dam construction), and the historical strength of indigenous movements (strong, moderate, and weak). I borrow the categorization of social movement strength from Brysk (2000). I look to see when environmental concerns united disparate indigenous groups to fight against a given issue and provide evidence that there has been a change in the conception of in-group/out-group distinction and thus the inclusion of other indigenous tribes. This comparison of diverse cases will help show that redefinition of identity occurs when environmental concerns have been deemed as a threat.

## A. Ecuador

I will start with Ecuador because its indigenous groups have been considered one of the most successful in Latin America (Brysk, 2000), and it will provide a good benchmark to compare the other indigenous identity movements. According to one account, Ecuador had the following ethnic groups at the time of the Spanish Conquest: the Esmeralda, Manta, Huancavilca, and Puná on the coast, and in the highlands the Pasto (near the Colombian border), Cara (in the current province of Imbabura), Panzaleo (near Quito), Puruhá (around Riobamba), and Cañari and Palta (in the southern highlands). Additionally, there are also “forest tribes”: the Jívaro (Shuar), Záparo (Zápara), Cofán (A’I), and Quechua in the eastern Amazon (Clark & Becker, 2007: 7). However, gathering information about indigenous groups is difficult because their view of their identity is very fluid and statistical data are scarce. There are also many socioeconomic differences among them. Regional differences are wide and identity is very locally tied. At the moment, it is believed that eight different indigenous groups survive in Ecuador’s Amazon region. Some of these groups fear intrusion from outside groups, such as the government, but also from other indigenous groups (*ibid*, p. 11). However, it is clear that historically, Ecuador had very diverse and various indigenous groups that viewed each other as outside members and distrusted each other.

Chevron, operating as Texaco at the time, is a multinational oil company that had been operating and drilling for oil in the Amazons since 1964. According to one count, Chevron is responsible for 1,000 toxic waste pits and 400 well sites that have led to the environmental degradation of the area. Its activity has led to many health issues, including a high cancer rate and miscarriages among residents in the area. Scuffles between Chevron

and local communities began in the 1980s. Disagreements finally led to a lawsuit filed by indigenous and farmer communities of Ecuador in a New York court in 1993, but Chevron successfully maneuvered to have the suit heard in an Ecuadorian court, and trials began in 2003 (Udapt, 2015). A lawsuit to determine how much damage Chevron is responsible for continues today.

Tracing the path of the model in Figure 2, the first step is that broad changes lead to a threat perception. This broad change is globalization, which allowed Chevron to operate in other parts of the world and do business with other parts of the world (Figure 2, Step 1). Next, there is a threat, which is environmental degradation of the Amazons due to oil drilling (Figure 2, Step 2). A small group of people appropriate this issue as worthy of consideration for the group, which is evident in all the data and statistics that the lawyers of this lawsuit use to show that Chevron's actions have had widespread health impacts on the people there (Figure 2, Step 3). Next, there is a shift in how people define their identity. While in the past, they saw themselves as disparate groups, they have now banded with other groups that are indigenous, which shows that they recognize their commonality of threat to indigenous peoples. This is shown through coalitions of indigenous peoples, such as the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) and the first ethnic federation in the Ecuadorian Amazon founded by the Shuar. These purely indigenous coalitions demonstrate that there is recognition that indigenous groups are part of the in-group, while non-indigenous peoples are part of the out-group (Figure 2, Step 4,). The leaders of the Shuars, in particular, used radio programs, a printing press, and technology to defend their culture (Clark & Becker, 2007:12). They then took action, which is bringing Chevron to court, using

the established protocols of the government (Figure 2, Step 5). Next there was an escalation of issues with Chevron's resistance (Figure 2, Step 6), which circles back and strengthened their desire to defend the environment because it is under threat (Figure 2, Step 2). Globalization created the environmental threat, which brought indigenous groups' commonality to the forefront, and also provided the technology, which these groups used to create their new identity. Their unification under various coalitions for the same cause show that they recognize a commonality in their identities that was not previously salient.

## **B. Brazil**

Brazil claims the largest portion of the Amazon rainforest. The Amazon is a rich ecosystem filled with numerous natural resources that are highly valuable. Its unexplored vastness and diversity means that it is an important locus of potentially lucrative resources. Many believe that the Amazon contains plants and animals that have powerful medicinal qualities that are still waiting to be discovered. Tribes living in the Amazon have survived off of its resources for thousands of years. Many indigenous groups engage in shamanistic activities, maintain traditional lifestyles, and remain disconnected from outside civilization. Although technically belonging to Brazil, the Brazilian government has a hard time regulating the Amazon because of its remote geography. There are weak institutions in place and little political will to tighten enforcement. Criminals used to be rampant in the area, and in many cases, collaborated with local politicians to perpetuate crime. The indigenous population there lives largely autonomously (Hoschtetler and Keck, 2007).

In the 1980s, cattle ranchers and other land speculators began to take interest in the Amazon rainforest for its potential minerals and plants. In the past, rubber tappers in the area were largely an unorganized group of individuals who happened to share the same

profession. Many of the rubber tappers were of indigenous origin, but they saw each other as competitors for tapping rubber. Instead of seeing a reason to unify, they saw a reason to compete because the income-earning aspect of their identity was most salient. Cattle ranchers and land speculators began to chop down the rainforest, clearing the land for grazing and exploitation. Globalization in the 1980s gave people the ability to access a larger market and earn more profit, which meant that they needed more resources to grow their business. This led people to expand their businesses to unprecedented levels, and they needed resources for their business, causing them to encroach onto indigenous lands (Figure 2, Step 1). The ranchers created a threat, which was an economic loss due to environmental depletion of rubber trees (Figure 2, Step 2).

When the rubber tappers faced possible economic loss, the fact that they shared the same profession but were facing the same threat came to the forefront. Leaders showed that this was a threat to all of them, and appropriated the threat as the reason for resistance (Figure 2, Step 3). Chico Mendes, a rubber tapper and activist, began to rally other rubber tappers to unite and fight against the ranchers to preserve their land. Though not indigenous himself, many of the colleagues that he rallied were of indigenous descent. The rubber tappers depended on the rubber trees that grew in the rainforest for their own economic survival (Hochstetler & Keck, 2007). They were able to come together to form a large coalition that drew the attention of the international community. In the process, Mendes expanded their goals to include indigenous rights. The umbrella indigenous movement was the new in-group, and it became appealing to be part of the in-group for others of indigenous descent as well. For the first time, these different peoples saw themselves as common sufferers, a new in-group, against the land speculators, a new out-



group. Because of this redefinition of the in-group, the rubber tappers favored members in the in-group and were willing to trust and help others within it, even though they were suspicious of them before (Figure 2, Step 4).

Mendes created the Xapuri tappers' union to be an offensive force against outside forces. Soon American environmentalists brought Mendes to speak with the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and the U.S. Congress. Mendes states, "At first I thought I was fighting to save rubber trees, then I thought I was fighting to save the Amazon rainforest. Now I realize I am fighting for humanity (Rocha & Watts, 2013)." Through this realization, he organized non-violent resistance, such as forming human barricades with men, women, and children to stop bulldozers from tearing down the trees. International networks and protest innovations, aided by technology and the media, allowed Mendes to draw broad attention (Figure 2, Step 5).

But Mendes made enemies because of his success (Figure 2, Step 6) and was assassinated in 1988, raising the issue of deforestation in the Amazon to new heights. The assassination allowed for the environmental threat to become more tangible to the people. Not only was fighting for the land important, it was important enough that others want to kill in order to preserve it. The assassination increased the sense of urgency, elevating the threat perception (looping back to Figure 2, Step 2). Slowly, the state began to take greater responsibility and to prioritize the Amazon. If the movement had only been among rubber tappers, it would most likely not have been able to draw the national and international attention that it did. It was the unification of indigenous peoples around a common cause that rendered them a formidable force. The Amazon became an integral symbol that united the indigenous groups who depended on it for their livelihood. Not only did they come to

recognize themselves as belonging to the same group, the state also recognized that they were a group that merited protection and rights.

### C. Peru

A third case is the teaming up of Peruvian indigenous groups to protest against a major dam project. Peruvian indigenous groups are generally seen as one of the least politically active of all the Latin American indigenous groups (Brysk, 2000). In 2012, the Peruvian government planned to construct six large hydroelectric dams in Peru to supply electricity to Brazil, a product of globalization and the need for more energy, especially clean energy (Figure 2, Step 1). This threatened the way of life of the indigenous peoples who lived there. These dams would flood the surrounding areas, displace thousands of people, and stop nutrient-rich sediment from traveling downstream to fertilize lower areas. Many people opposed to the dam building were afraid to even speak out against it (Hill, 2015). They faced an existential threat both from the environmental damage as a result of the dam and from the violent tactics of dam proponents. These environmental threats became a salient issue that united people (Figure 2, Step 2).

Outside groups, such as the Defense of Life and the Environment (ADEVIMA) and inside groups composed of the local residents took up this cause (Figure 2, Step 3). Moreover, the movement extended to indigenous groups in Brazil. Many of the indigenous groups in Latin America are divided by arbitrary political boundaries. The border that separates Peru and Bolivia divides the Quechuas who live in Lake Titicaca, separating even some Quechuan families. "Our problems are almost identical to the native peoples of other countries," said Marcos Apurina from the Coordination of Indigenous Organisations of the Brazilian Amazon (Coiab). When Tashka Yawanawa, a Brazilian indigenous leader, saw the

protests in Peru, he began to organize Brazilian indigenous peoples to fight the same cause. Borders no longer shaped their identity. This new environmental concern made environmental protection for indigenous peoples the important feature of their identity. They were able to redefine the in-group/out-group and assist Peruvian indigenous groups, now part of their in-group, with their cause. Yawanawa used Skype, a tool made available all over the world through globalization, to call other indigenous leaders and rally his friends and acquaintances to the cause (Fellet, 2012). Indigenous people united to save their homes from dam building (Figure 2, Step 4). Protests from the Peruvian indigenous groups were so disruptive that the Peruvian government had to suspend the projects (Figure 2, Step 5). The natives feared that building the dams would cause irreversible damage to their environment, leading to an escalation of the threat (Figure 2, Step 6).

Other projects, such as the Inter-Oceanic Highway that connects Brazil to Peruvian Pacific ports, were vehemently opposed by indigenous movements and have brought indigenous issues to the center of the international stage (Fellet, 2012). Although the Highway has now been completed, indigenous people have achieved international attention by uniting several distinct peoples together under one banner and calling attention to their common campaign to protect the environment. They are fighting against large oil companies and resisting plans to build dams (Cevallos, 2007). No longer are they seen as disparate and weak peoples, but as an entity of indigenosity that when joined together has become a political tour de force.

## 7. Conclusion

I have presented a model that synthesized aspects of Contentious Politics and Social Identity Theory to better explain how indigenous groups in Latin America have been able to overcome their identity differences and cooperated against outside forces. I have also elaborated on three cases, from Ecuador, Brazil, and Peru, which support this model. Indigenous peoples of Latin America have historically identified with their own tribes and seen other tribes as outsiders. But recent developments with globalization and related environmental threats, which endanger their quality of life, have served as the impetus for them to redefine their in-group membership and identity to include other indigenous tribes. I have modified the dynamic model of contentious politics to map how indigenous groups have formed new identities when faced with globalization forces and environmental concerns. The model starts with a broad social change, whereby globalization brings indigenous groups more contact with external groups (Figure 2, Step 1). In many instances, this contact stems from environmental exploitation, which is especially threatening for indigenous groups because their livelihood depends on the direct consumption of surrounding resources (Figure 2, Step 2). Then, leaders appropriate this threat to form a social cause (Figure 2, Step 3). With a different characteristic of their identity heightened - their common struggle against a similar threat - indigenous groups are able to reconceptualize members of the in-group versus members of the out-group, and other strugglers of the same threat become the new in-group members. This messaging occurs with the aid of technology, such as Skype and media attention (Figure 2, Step 4). This then leads to innovative collective action, including protests and blockades (Figure 2,

Step 5). The perceived threat can gain momentum and escalate (Figure 2, Step 6), which can create more opportunities for attribution of the threat (Step 2, Figure 2).

This analysis forebodes that more environmental issues in the future will lead to greater unification of indigenous groups fighting over their rights to resources. Widespread changes in production and consumption patterns can greatly alter the environment and deplete limited resources. Once bountiful resources are in fact dwindling. Because indigenous groups rely so heavily on environmental factors for survival, more resource depletion will lead to further clashes with indigenous groups in the future.

Learning about how social identities form among indigenous groups is also important for understanding social factors that allow non-dominant actors to gain political power. The fact that distinct indigenous tribes can redefine their identities to include other tribes shows that in-group membership can be expanded and made more inclusive. Although indigenous rights have improved in the past decades, there is still much room for progress.

A study for future investigation is comparing these three cases with instances where environmental threats did *not* lead to successful mobilization. What caused the break down of social identity reconstruction? What are the necessary and sufficient factors that lead to identity reformation and social movements? Conducting an analysis of unsuccessful mass mobilizations would complement this paper's question of, "*How* social movements," by providing an answer to, "*When* social movements". Other future interesting research questions moving forward would be, "Why are some indigenous groups politically stronger than others?" and, "How do indigenous groups vary in their tactics for redefining identity and mobilization?"

Instead of emphasizing one feature of a person's identity, a better way to be more inclusive is to recognize that people belong to multiple categories at the same time. Indigenous people have been able to gain recognition by heightening their indigenous commonality and forcing the state and the international community to recognize their common struggles. Calling on this social identity could allow them to stay united and mobilize for more equal rights in the future. As future unpredictable and broad changes further challenge the traditional way of life of indigenous peoples, one way for them to remain resilient is by redefining and including more members into their social group in order to form a more formidable force.

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