Public Abstract

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The 1990s witnessed the widespread formation of political parties organized around indigenous identity throughout the Latin American region. This project examines that phenomenon within the case of Bolivia. Bolivia was home to the region's first and most successful indigenous political parties. Three primary areas of interest are examined: emergence, support, and representative efforts. Traditional explanations for political party emergence and support fall into social and institutional explanations. Concerning emergence, these theories are incomplete when applied to indigenous political parties because of inattention to the environment in which changes occur. This project argues that economic recession, increased coca eradication efforts, and decentralization policies provided the stimulus for indigenous groups to form political parties. This theory is applied to Bolivia and its indigenous political parties. Concerning political party support, social and institutional explanations are compared using the region's most successful indigenous party, Movimiento al Socialismo. Social explanations carry the most explanatory weight while institutional factor pale in comparison. Finally, the representation efforts of Movimiento al Socialismo are examined in the first review of representation provided by indigenous political parties. The review finds legislative efforts directed at natural resources and cultural preservation, but little attention given to autonomy and native justice issues.