

“We were forgotten”. The effect of linkages between indigenous peoples and political parties on ethnic voting in Bolivia

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Abstract

With the election of Evo Morales and his party “Movement to Socialism” (MAS)¹ in 2005, Bolivia has become famous as Latin America’s only country with an indigenous party in power. It is misleading, however, to refer to an “indigenous government” representing all of Bolivia’s ethnic diversity. Instead, one can identify two subgroups amongst Bolivia’s indigenous population: indigenous peoples from the Andean highlands and valleys (“tierras altas” or “occidente”) and indigenous peoples from the eastern and Amazonian lowlands (“tierras bajas” or “oriente”). Research has so far focused on the large Andean indigenous peoples or treated the indigenous population as uniform. It has placed its main focus on parties and not on voters. This paper aims at differentiating the picture. It sets out to show that differences between highland and lowland indigenous peoples have started with the appearance of the first major indigenous party *Conciencia de Patria* (CONDEPA) and have increased since MAS came to power. While the indigenous peoples from the highlands showed preferences for parties of the left political spectrum, the lowland indigenous peoples have rather spread their votes on a large number of parties with a tendency to centre-right parties. The paper attempts to answer the question of how these differences in the voting behaviour of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples can be explained. Ethnic voting is analysed in the time span from 1985 until 2014 within a mixed-methods design, interpreting municipality level census and election data in their historical context, complemented by guided interviews with social scientists, indigenous politicians and activists.

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Key words: ethnic voting, indigenous peoples, party voter linkages, cleavages, Bolivia

¹¹ Originally *Movimiento al Socialismo – Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos* (MAS-IPSP), but in the following for reasons of simplicity abbreviated by MAS.

Introduction

Since 2005, Bolivia has become known as Latin America's only country with an indigenous president and an indigenous party, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), in power. Bolivia's socio-ethnic panorama is highly diverse. The 2009 constitution establishes 36 indigenous languages. Whereas only three indigenous peoples (Quechua, Aymara and Uru-Chipaya) live mainly in the Andean highlands and valleys, 32 indigenous peoples live in the lowlands. While highland peoples are few, but have large numbers of members, lowland peoples are many with small numbers of members. As the Andean indigenous population constitutes the vast majority, they have a high weight as voters in elections and thus possess a relatively high visibility at the political level. Particularly the Aymara are politically very active and their candidates frequently participate in formal politics. When speaking of an "indigenous government", the question arises who the government factually represents.

Looking at the electoral results between 1985 and 2014, we will demonstrate that it is wrong to treat Bolivia's indigenous population as homogenous, as their voting behaviour varies considerably. This gap is most noticeable between the highlands and valleys and the lowlands. Indigenous peoples from the highlands and valleys have mostly voted for parties of the left political spectrum and showed elevated support for indigenous parties, whereas lowland indigenous peoples have spread their votes on a large number of parties with tendencies to the right political spectrum. The differences in the voting behaviour of ethnic groups began with the emergence of the first major indigenous party in 1989, CONDEPA. Surprisingly, when MAS, a political party with a pro-indigenous agenda, an indigenous president and alliances with multiple indigenous organizations from highlands and lowlands, entered the political stage, the discrepancy in voting behavior between highland and lowland indigenous even increased.

Research has placed its focus of attention on the large Andean indigenous peoples or considered the indigenous population as a unit. Besides, it has mainly taken into account political parties and not voters. Even though the existing research on ethnic politics doesn't treat differences in the voting behaviour of indigenous peoples, research on policies, identity, clientelism and social movements provides valuable approaches to their analysis. Research on party systems offers convincing explanations for the rise of ethnic parties and the shift or large voter groups from one party to another. The study of social cleavages as affecting party cleavages equally represents a fruitful approach for differences between groups of voters in Bolivia. However, as research doesn't differentiate between distinct indigenous peoples, it needs to be further developed with regard to understanding differences in the electoral behaviour of indigenous peoples.

This article seeks to offer a different perspective on ethnic politics in Bolivia. It sets out to show and explain the prevailing differences between highland and lowland indigenous peoples before and after MAS' electoral victory. It follows the hypothesis that the historical linkages between indigenous peoples and political parties have a strong impact on the differing electoral behaviour of Bolivia's indigenous peoples. Ethnic voting is analysed in the time span from 1985 until 2014 within a mixed-methods design. Municipality level census and election data are analysed on the basis of ecological inference methods. The descriptive results of this quantitative analysis are put in their historical context by evaluating the results of guided interviews with experts, indigenous politicians and activists in Bolivia in addition to scientific sources.

Theoretical framework: Party-voter linkages and ethnic voting

The question this article attempts to answer is: Which impact do the linkages between highland and lowland indigenous peoples and political parties have on indigenous peoples' voting behaviour? In the Bolivian cases, a puzzle of several theoretical approaches helps to understand the differences in indigenous peoples' electoral choices.

“Ethnic voting” is defined as the variance in the voting behaviour of ethnic groups. If differences in the voting behaviour of ethnic groups don’t exist, then there is no ethnic voting. “Indigenous party” is understood as a an organization authorized to compete in local or national elections, that prioritizes the interests of an indigenous people or various indigenous peoples and its electoral platform includes demands in favour of one or several indigenous people(s).² The concept of “indigenous” employed in this article is based on the self-identification of the individual as indigenous, meaning a self-understanding as descendant of the native Americans who lived on the continent before the arrival of the European colonizers. This concept disregards language or colour. The article consequently employs data on self-identification.

Explaining party-voter linkages

Linkages between political parties and their electorate have been treated in the literature on party systems. They explain the shift of large parts of voters from one party to another. Blurred party brands can lead to a destabilization of the party system and eventually a dealignment (Roberts 2014). The behaviour of political parties during so called “critical junctures”, e.g. moments of crisis, can cause a loss of credibility and identification in their electorates, which will then eventually provoke the breakdown of a prevailing political system (Lupu 2016, Roberts 2014). The reshaping of the political landscape can provoke a relocation of large amounts of votes, that is, a realignment (Carreras 2012).

The cleavage approach seems promising for the analysis of Bolivian society and the electoral behaviour of ethnic groups: Kitschelt (1995) explains the structure of party systems and voters’ party preferences by the prevailing cleavages or conflict lines in societies. He further developed Lipset’s and Rokkan’s (1967) theory on social cleavages, which they considered to be baselines for the configurations of party systems. They observed Western European party systems and established four types of cleavages, which had evolved since industrialization: capital versus labour, urbanism versus ruralism, religion versus secularism, and centre versus periphery. Kitschelt analyzed post-communist democracies and found three types of social conflict lines. They comprise voters’ economic interests – liberal market economy versus state protectionism or the conventional left-right axis –, socio-cultural and religious conflicts – religious traditionalists versus secular libertarians –, and relations amongst ethnic groups, more specifically between ethnic majorities and minorities, which had been marked by the ethnic division of labour under socialism. In Bolivian society, we can identify three major conflict lines: regional rivalry, opposed economic interests, and relations amongst ethnic groups.

Electoral research turns around the questions of how parties and politicians manage to gather electoral support and what motives drive voters to support parties and their politicians. We can identify two linkages through which political parties and electorate enter in long-term relationships with each other, which appear helpful for the analysis of the Bolivian case.

Political agendas and policies have a major impact on the voting behaviour. Voters support political parties approving or expecting certain policies in favour of their own ethnic group (minority). As the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous citizens is still enormous, poverty, poor education and discrimination affect indigenous lives in multiple ways. One can speak of an ethnic division of labour which runs through Bolivian society (Gigler 2009). Indigenous peoples are the social group that would in the first place profit from policies, such as welfare or multicultural policies, and have strong motives to support parties implementing those policies (Downs 1957, Bornschier 2010). Parties have focused on particular indigenous peoples throughout Bolivian history, which has sustainably shaped the party preferences of those groups.

² Our definition follows Madrid (2012) and Van Cott (2003).

Collective identity – mentioned above – is one of those linkages. Voters support political party candidates according to their ethnic or other identity, striving for the reaffirmation of this specific identity. Candidates, in turn, emphasize a specific collective identity and appeal to their electorate on the basis of it (Campbell 1980). It must previously have become politicized (Kaltmeier 2007). Indigenous peoples in Bolivia and Latin America have historically been excluded from political representation and were socially and economically marginalised. The representation of their ethnic identities at the political level and their recognition at the social level are great motives for ethnic voting according to the identity theory (Rice 2011, Van Cott 2000).

Another linkage between political parties and voters is through clientelistic networks. Voters would support political parties expecting resources in reward for votes. Members of ethnic groups would not vote for parties according to political contents or ideological positions, but choose a specific party calculating the highest likelihood of gaining political representation, positions, personal favours or material compensation (Chandra 2004, Kitschelt 2000, Horowitz 1985). Ethnicity is in this case a means to obtain resources. Clientelism is hard to prove empirically. However, evidence suggests that it is likely to be an influential factor on ethnic voting in Bolivia.

Social movements have been identified as connectors between groups of voters, e.g. indigenous peoples, and political parties. They are considered central actors for the appearance and maintenance of ethnic parties (Van Cott 2005, Yashar 2005, Collins 2006, Rice 2006). In Bolivia, indigenous parties in the 1980ies and 1990ies principally had their roots in organizations of a particular ethnic group, originated in the highlands, recruited members in this one group and failed to knot ties with organizations beyond this group's territory. MAS managed to establish ties with indigenous interest organizations in the highlands and lowlands and reach a broader spectrum of voters across ethnic borders. Madrid (2012) sees social movements as part of the secret of success of MAS, as the party emerged from a conglomerate of peasant unions and organizations representing indigenous interests. The breakup of the indigenous movement during MAS' legislative period was accompanied by an increase in ethnic voting in the same lapse of time.

Alternative explanations

Large parts of the literature on ethnic politics have focused on the emergence and success of recent indigenous parties, principally Bolivia's MAS, and their strategies to gather electoral support (Madrid 2012, Martí i Puig 2008, Rice 2011). Madrid explains the success of MAS by its inclusionary approach and the discursive highlighting not only of indigenous, but also the addressing of *mestizos* and non-indigenous, as a difference to former indigenous katarista parties, which mainly spoke to one particular ethnic group (the Aymara) and verbally excluded others. Flesken (2015) proved an actual decrease in indigenous rhetoric during the MAS government between 2005 and 2010. However, as we will show in the empirical part of this paper, in spite of the drop in indigenous rhetoric, the share of highland indigenous voters who supported MAS increased in this period. Hence, it seems that discourse has a minor effect on the voting behaviour of Bolivia's indigenous peoples and appears not to be a sufficient explanation for MAS' success amongst indigenous voters.

Another observation scholars made is that in Bolivia – until the rise of MAS – indigenous parties were rather short-lived, if they were at all able to fulfil all requirements of the National Electoral Court for registration. The abolishment of institutional hurdles played a major role in the emergence and persistence of indigenous parties. Restrictive rules for the foundation of parties and penalties for parties with low electoral success were particularly hard to overcome for small indigenous parties with a minor number of voters and limited resources in the 1980ies and 1990ies (Van Cott 2005, Birnir 2004). Institutional changes were the entry keys for indigenous peoples to formal politics (Van Cott 2003). Rigid institutional requirements in the 1980ies and 1990ies had the effect of keeping parts of the society out of the formal political system and decision-making positions and kept them without political representation. Those hurdles appeared to be intentionally designed by the elites that had governed the country since the beginning of the republic (Van Cott 2005). In this context,

research on ethnic politics and indigenous parties focused on the antagonism between oligarchic elites versus indigenous activists and the attempts of the latter to acquire political representation and participation (Birbir 2004, Van Cott 2003, Van Cott 2005). In the case of Bolivia, those hurdles could only account for differences in the voting behaviour of indigenous peoples until 2004, when a constitutional reform allowed indigenous organizations and civil associations for elections, which facilitated the active participation of the indigenous population in politics. However, as we will show in the empirical part of this article, even though the main lowland indigenous organizations (initially) supported MAS, ethnic voting increased particularly after the beginning of its government. Hence, this institutional approach cannot explain discrepancy in the voting behaviour between highland and lowland indigenous peoples at least since 2005.

Data and methods

Bolivia is the Latin American country with the largest indigenous population. According to the 2001 census, the population comprised 8.274.325 persons. Nearly two thirds of the population self-identified as belonging to an indigenous people.³ The largest indigenous people are the Quechua with 30.69%, the second largest people the Aymara with 25.19%, both living mainly in the Andean highlands and valleys, even though there has been migration of indigenous highland population to the booming metropolis Santa Cruz in the past years. The lowland indigenous peoples sum up to around 6% of the population (INE 2001) and represent ethnic minorities compared to the indigenous highland population. The largest indigenous lowland peoples are Chiquitano, Mojeño and Guaraní.

Research on ethnic politics has so far dedicated its attention to the indigenous population as a whole or to the highland indigenous peoples, overlooking the lowland indigenous peoples. When speaking of “indigenous parties”, scholars have barely asked whom these parties represent and how unrepresented indigenous peoples vote. As a difference to the research on ethnic politics which has been done so far and which has almost entirely focused on parties (Birbir 2004, Madrid 2012, Martí I Puig 2008, Van Cott 2003), the focus of this article will be on voters. Scholars who did analyse indigenous voters and their electoral preferences (Rice 2011) for the most part considered them as homogenous units. Guzmán described differences in the voting behaviour of indigenous peoples, but didn’t attempt to explain them (2014). Phenomena like indigenous voting for conservative, non-indigenous parties still wait for explanations. Bolivia’s indigenous peoples have in fact spread their votes to a variety of political parties before and since MAS came to power. This article will take into account the heterogeneity of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples and attempt to explain the differences in the voting behaviour of highland and lowland indigenous peoples. The linkages between different indigenous peoples and political parties have likewise been ignored. In the Bolivian case, highland and lowland indigenous peoples have developed different linkages with the state and political parties and found diverging ways of political expression and strategies to reach political visibility. This article will show the impact of these linkages on the voting behaviour of ethnic groups, analysing the linkages those peoples developed with the state and political parties over time.

³ The share of the indigenous population remained stable between the 1992 and 2001 census, but dropped drastically between the 2001 and 2012 census. It is suspected that the drop is related to the way the question on ethnicity was posed in the two censuses. In 2001, the question was: “Do you consider yourself as belonging to one of the following native or indigenous peoples: Quechua? Aymara? Guaraní? Chiquitano? Mojeño? Other native?” In 2012, the question was modified to: “As a Bolivian, do you belong to any nation or indigenous native peasant or Afro-Bolivian people?” If the respondent replied with “yes”, he or she could freely ascribe him or herself an ethnic label. In comparison, the LAPOP population survey uses stable questions. Its results on ethnic affiliation in the same period of time nearly didn’t change. This appears to verify the assumption that the drop in indigenous affiliation was provoked by the extinction of the options on ethnic affiliation in the 2012 census. Besides, the 2001 census is closely in line with similar data on ethnic self-identification in the Latinobarometro survey. This is why we will prefer the 2001 census to the 2012 census, unless indispensable data is only available in the 2012 census.

Ecological inferences from aggregate data

We use election results at the lowest possible ecological level between 1985 and 2014. For the period between 1985 to 2005 we use the data collected by Raúl Madrid (República de Bolivia and Madrid 2011), for 2009 and 2014 we collected additional data. For the elections up to 1997 the data had to be aggregated to the provincial level since municipalities changed often and did not allow to match census with election data at this ecological level. We matched the election data with the census data from 2001 since only in 2001 a closed question asked about ethnic self-identification for five ethnic group plus a category for 'other' indigenous identities and one for non-indigenous identity (see Footnote 2). The census data covers the size of the Quechua, Aymara, Guarani, Chiquitano, and Mojeño of which we aggregated the latter three to one category of lowland indigenous.

In order to estimate the electoral behaviour by each ethnic group we apply ecological inference method (King 1997). This method bases its estimates on two main sources of information. First, it bases its estimates on the co-variance of the ethnic group size and the aggregate electoral results per ecological unit. Second, it makes use of information from the deterministic boundaries of the possible electoral behavior of each group, which can be deduced from the combination of the homogeneity of the group sizes and the uniformity of electoral behavior. Since most municipalities are ethnically homogenous, there are many cases in which the group level voting behavior can be estimated rather precisely from the observation of the aggregates. Also, this information is used in order to estimate voting behavior in more heterogeneous municipalities.

In our application we run RxC multinomial-dirichlet models (Lau, Moore, and Kellermann 2007) and aggregate from the mean municipality estimate to the national level. We treat abstention as one among the C categories of vote choice. The ecological inference estimates are based on two crucial assumptions. First, it is assumed that there is no aggregation bias, i.e. that the vote share of the different ethnic groups are mean independent. The second crucial assumption is that the voting behavior at the level of the aggregate units (here: municipalities) can be modelled as a truncated normal distribution. This means that the method does not assume uniform voting behavior across groups, but that the voting behavior of the ethnic groups does resemble each other across municipalities in a systematic way.

While our data seems to be suited for ecological inferences the possibility of unobserved aggregation bias cannot be excluded. Hence, in order to validate our operationalization we compare our results from the ecological inference models with existing survey data. Survey data is available for the 2002, 2005, 2009, and 2014 elections.⁴ Changes in the categorization scheme of the LAPOP survey regarding minor indigenous groups and non-indigenous only allows us to compare the party vote shares of the Aymara, Quechua and lowland indigenous.

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1 depicts a scatter plot with the party vote shares by the three ethnic groups based on our ecological inference analysis and the same values calculated on the basis of the LAPOP data. The scatter plot depicts an almost perfect correlation ($R=0.97$) which reveals that our analysis estimates are highly valid. The systematically lower vote shares calculated on the basis from the ecological inference method stems from the fact that in this analysis we include blank and invalid votes.⁵

Semi-structured guided interviews

⁴ We made use of the Bolivian version of the LAPOP survey of 2004, 2006, 2010, and 2014. To measure vote choice we made use of the recall question in the first three surveys while we used the question on vote intention for the 2014 data.

⁵ The correlation drops only slightly to 0.94 if we include the – imperfectly operationalized - categories "other indigenous" and "non-indigenous".

For the interpretative analysis, we realized a field research in place in 2016 and confronted experts, indigenous activists and politicians with the results we generated from the ecological inference analysis on group level voting behaviour in Bolivia. A balanced selection of the interviewees, including indigenous politicians and activists of the main indigenous organizations as well as scientific analysts, covered the full range of perspectives. The thematic focuses were: the linkages between indigenous peoples with political parties and the state, motivations for the decisions of indigenous candidates to engage in specific parties (or outside of political parties), reasons for alliances and motives for political party preferences. The results of the interviews were triangulated with the quantitative results on electoral behaviour over the time and academic secondary sources. The interviews permitted a contextualization and interpretation of the results of the quantitative data analysis.

Why do lowland indigenous peoples vote differently from highland indigenous peoples?

The linkages between highland and lowland indigenous peoples with political parties and, more broadly speaking, the state, evolved in diverging ways. The indigenous peoples of the lowlands had until the 1960ies only very loose or no linkages with the state. The indigenous highland population had, due to their integration into the colonial and republican state and their large history of submission as labour force in the mines, gathered broad experience in political protest and political organization (Antezana Ergueta 1994, Rojas Ramírez 1989).

In spite of the geographic extension of the lowlands – more than half of the territory is situated at less than 1500 m in the subtropical and Amazonian zone –, the lowlands appeared politically insignificant to the leaders in La Paz, as they were scarcely populated and the rural areas hard to reach due to lack of infrastructure (Gigler 2009). The state considered the lowlands as empty territories and distributed grounds to large scale owners as pasturelands for cattle farming. Given the state's absence, they were able to dominate the region's economy and politics for decades. The lowland indigenous population was for long time ignored by political parties, due to their small size and their low weight in national elections. Besides, parts of the lowland population were not officially registered and consequently did not form part of the body of voters (Nasini C. 2002, Van Cott 2005).

In the 1950ies, the vast majority of the Bolivians used to live in the rural Altiplano. The addressee of party appeals was first of all the Andean population. In the context of the 1952 National Revolution, MNR initiated a series of reforms which would benefit the highland indigenous population, like the establishment of universal suffrage, a redistribution of land (expropriation of large-estate owners, redistribution to indigenous farmers) and the organization of farmers in labour unions. The reforms imposed a socialist ideology on the rural indigenous population, categorizing them as "farmers" and partly dissolved political indigenous structures. Especially the highland indigenous population stayed strongly attached to the MNR until the 1990ies (see below).

The military dictatorships of the 1960ies and 1970ies were the first to politically involve the lowland indigenous population (Van Cott 2005). General Rene Barrientos Ortuño (1964-69) sealed the Peasant-Military-Pact with indigenous leaders (*caciques*) in the whole country and established a network of clientelism and political favours between them and his government, which guaranteed the support of the rural population. General Hugo Banzer Suárez (1971-78) and his party ADN, which he founded in 1979, had its major base of support in the lowlands, including the indigenous voters.

While indigenous identity in the lowlands has to large parts of the indigenous population not gained much salience until today, indigenous identity in the highlands politicized from the 1960ies on. At that time, an arising class of Aymara intellectuals started criticizing the ongoing imposition of state interests on the indigenous population and the disregard of their needs. The katarista movement emerged, named after the Aymara rebel Tupak Katari who resisted Spanish colonial rule and was executed in 1781. The kataristas strongly emphasized their cultural otherness to the ruling classes,

who were seen as the successors of the European colonizers. Katarismo was the ideological source for future indigenous parties.

The labour union organizational structures paired with Katarista ideology were the basis for the emergence of indigenous organizations in the highlands in the 1980ies. During the transition to democracy, the peasant union Unitary Unionized Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB) was founded, which had its main roots in the highlands and represents Aymaras and Quechuas (Gigler 2009, Schilling-Vacaflor 2010, Van Cott 2005). Socialist ideology and indigenous consciousness are nowadays strongly intertwined in the highlands (Gigler 2009, Van Cott 2005). In total 20 indigenous parties, which in their majority united katarista and socialist ideology, were founded between 1985 and 2014. 85% of them had minor success (less than 5% of the votes) in national elections. Only CONDEPA, Movimiento Indígena Pachakuti (MIP) and MAS were more successful.

Indigenous peoples in the lowlands started mobilizing at the end of the 1970ies and founded the Indigenous Confederation of the East and Amazon of Bolivia (CIDOB) in 1982, which built its networks with lowland indigenous organizations during the 1980ies. In 1990, CIDOB organized the so called “March for Territory and Dignity” in protest against the unequal distribution of land in the lowlands and the political ignorance of lowland indigenous interests over nearly 600 km from Trinidad in the lowlands to La Paz in the Altiplano. Their march was supported by highland activists who joined them on their way. It was the origin of a social movement of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples and raised national awareness for lowland indigenous demands for the first time. Until the 2000s, CIDOB remained an important actor for the defence of the interests of the lowland indigenous population (Van Cott 2005). The indigenous organizations of the lowlands didn’t found their own distinct party. Due to their numerical inferiority and the 3% threshold that existed until 2004 they would with high probability not receive parliamentary representation. When reaching less than 3% of the votes, they were obliged to pay a penalty payment⁶. Besides, the political experience and organizational structures were missing in the lowlands.

[Figure 2 about here]

[Figure 3 about here]

[Figure 4 about here]

As our analysis shows, voting behaviour was similar across indigenous peoples in the 1980ies. Shortly after the transition to democracy, in the 1985 elections, all indigenous peoples showed a general attachment to the main political forces MNR, ADN and MIR, while ADN turned out to be the electoral winner. Aymara and Quechua spread their votes more or less equally to those parties. MNR was still popular in the highland countryside because of the pro-indigenous reforms they had implemented in the 1950ies. The party of highest preference for the three main lowland indigenous peoples was right-wing ADN in 1985 (37%), few years after the fall of the military junta and transition to democracy. Not only had the 1982 MNR government initiated a disastrous inflation and ADN appeared as the political salvation, which is probably why even Aymara slightly preferred ADN (24%) to MNR (22%). The military junta, which ADN leader Hugo Banzer had headed for seven years, had been the first government to give lowland indigenous authorities a role in politics. As no party won the absolute majority, the Parliament nominated MNR as the governing force, as ADN's candidate Banzer was not considered apt for government, due to his role in the previous dictatorship. MNR initiated a neoliberal adjustment program, which successfully stopped the hyperinflation, but at the

⁶ According to the 1979 electoral law, parties gaining less than 50.000 votes had to cover the costs of printing ballots, which was very difficult for indigenous parties with minor budgets (Birnie 2004). This praxis was abolished in 2004.

same time led to mass unemployment in the highlands. This can be considered MNR's first moment of dissociation from its main body of voters.

Figure 2 visualizes MNR's vote shares of Aymara, Quechua, the lowland indigenous peoples and others since 1985 until 2005. It shows its relatively equal popularity amongst the indigenous peoples in the 1985 elections, even though it was slightly more popular amongst the lowland indigenous peoples, where its support stayed more or less constant over the following years. It experienced a steady drop of Quechua votes and a drastic decrease of Aymara votes with the appearance of CONDEPA, which it could recover until 1997, but then lost them again.

Figure 3 visualizes ADN's vote shares of Aymara, Quechua, the lowland indigenous peoples and others since 1985 until 2002. It shows its relatively steady support by all voter groups, even though its popularity was higher amongst lowland indigenous peoples. After 1997, its support fell amongst all voter groups. Only the other voters had begun to withdraw their votes from ADN already from 1989 on.

[Figure 5 about here]

The 1989 elections and the appearance of the first major indigenous party marked the beginning of ethnic voting in Bolivia. Both large highland indigenous peoples mainly voted for left parties. Amongst the new indigenous parties figured CONDEPA, which was the first indigenous party to gain a two-digit electoral result. CONDEPA was influenced by the Katarismo ideology and in its political appeals targeted the strategic Aymara municipalities La Paz and El Alto, where CONDEPA leader Carlos Palenque emitted popular radio programs (Goedeking 2003). Aymara voters preferred parties further to the left political spectrum and indigenous parties, in the first place CONDEPA, but also MNR-V, MRTKL, MNRI1 and MRTK, which were equally offsprings of the katarista movement, whereas Quechua voters showed a rather "mainstream" electoral behaviour and a general preference for centre-leftist parties. As Figure 5 shows, it attracted mainly Aymara votes (29%), whereas its share amongst all other ethnic groups ranged between 1 and 2%, except for the 1997 elections, when CONDEPA was slightly more popular amongst them, especially Quechua voters. CONDEPA lost political importance after 1997 due to the death of its leader Carlos Palenque and its coalition with right-wing ADN, which provoked a severe damage to its ideological credibility and the virtual loss of its electorate.

Compared to the highland indigenous constituency, lowland indigenous voters already at that time showed a regional entrenchment and an orientation towards the main local or regional political forces in their electoral behaviour.

"En el oriente del país los partidos políticos que más influencia tuvieron son de centro derecha [...]. Por tanto los pueblos indígenas del oriente boliviano han participado de la vida política de la región. Apoyan a los partidos del oriente boliviano, que son más tradicionales, del centro derecha, que están culturalmente más legitimados en la vida política del oriente boliviano. Son partidos generalmente de empresarios, algunos ganaderos, hacendados, pero que logran tener la legitimidad, el consenso, porque son grupos económicamente dominantes." (18)

In 1993, CONDEPA gained votes in general, but lost part of the Aymara votes, perhaps because of the campaign of the latter electoral winner MNR in coalition with Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Katari de Liberación (MRTKL), which was headed by the Aymara Víctor Hugo Cárdenas, the vice-president in the subsequent legislative period. As a concession to the growing indigenous movement, the MNR-MRTKL government implemented a series of important reforms for the indigenous population, like the Law of Education Reform (1994), implementing bilingual education, the Law of Agricultural Reform Law (1996), recognizing collective land titles as a concession to ancient forms of indigenous territorial administration, and the Law of Popular Participation (1994), which introduced

elections at municipality level. The latter reform was meant to increase the degree of local participation and made it easier for small local parties to present themselves for elections, as municipal had lower requirements than national elections (Schilling-Vacaflor 2010, Van Cott 2005).

Nevertheless, most lowland indigenous constituents didn't identify with the so called indigenous parties such as MRTKL or CONDEPA, as they were seen as dominated by the highland indigenous peoples. They were rather attached to the regional powers of the eastern lowland, which were centred in ADN, MNR and MIR, which are the parties the lowland indigenous voters supported.

“Los partidos indígenas generalmente han sido partidos que [...] nacen de la visión Quechua o Aymara. Entonces no son atractivos a una adherencia de los pueblos indígenas del oriente boliviano de tierras bajas [...], porque está la variable regional. Bolivia tiene un clivaje entre el oriente y occidente. [...] En el oriente del país los partidos políticos que más influencia tuvieron son de centro derecha y los pueblos indígenas del oriente boliviano no se animarían a apoyar a partidos indígenas – por más indígenas que sean – del occidente del país, porque son partidos que representan a grupos étnicos del occidente – Aymara, Quechua – que nada tienen que ver con los pueblos del oriente boliviano. Por tanto los pueblos indígenas del oriente boliviano han participado de la vida política de la región. Apoyan a los partidos del oriente boliviano que son más tradicionales del centro-derecha, que están culturalmente más legitimados en la vida política del oriente boliviano, que son partidos generalmente de empresarios, algunos ganaderos, hacendados, pero que logran tener la legitimidad, el consenso, porque son grupos económicamente dominantes. Entonces en la cultura política en el oriente boliviano estos partidos son influyentes y han influenciado tanto que los grupos indígenas que quisieron participar en la vida política han participado apoyando a los partidos que existían.” (18)

In terms of political strategies, instead of creating their own party, lowland indigenous leaders decided to form alliances with a variety of parties for municipal elections, including MNR, MIR, ADN and Civil Solidary Union (UCS) (Van Cott 2005). The same was the case in national elections; lowland indigenous leaders negotiated with existing parties for the access to national politics. At the same time, the possibilities for the foundation of their own political parties and the latter's persistence in parliament were extremely narrow for lowland indigenous organizations until the constitutional reform in 2004, due to the numerical inferiority of lowland indigenous peoples. The alliances between lowland indigenous organizations and existing political parties at the municipal level, which evolved after the 1994 Law of Popular Participation, had therefore crucial relevance for the lowland indigenous population. The linkages to political parties, which lowland indigenous leaders established in the context of those alliances, seem to have translated themselves into vote choices at the national level.

The choices for alliance partners at local level seem to have been taken according to pragmatic motives, meaning the best political offer of the moment, that is, an assessment of benefits political party candidates promised to indigenous community leaders.

“Entonces en lugar de buscar un candidato indígena para apoyar, más creo en ti. ¿Por qué? Porque sé que tú tienes la plata, tú me vas a dar para que yo haga campaña, y yo con mi comunidad ya vamos a tener un espacio cuando tú ya salgas elegido.” (15)

Lowland indigenous voters seem to have followed the political culture of their interest organization leaders in their electoral behaviour, namely a preference of short-term benefits to long-term political visions. This assumption is supported by the fact that lowland indigenous peoples' matters have never been part of the electoral campaign of any political party, meaning there was no political long-term offer suiting their specific needs.

“Las tierras bajas nunca hemos estado en ningún programa político, más allá de estar [...] en algunos programas que nos han llevado, de salud, el tema de la alimentación.” (18)

Even when lowland indigenous candidates presented themselves for parties with pro lowland indigenous agendas, as was the case in 1997 with MBL or in 2014 with PVB, they preferred conventional parties with a tendency towards regionally entrenched centre-rightist parties.

Cooperation with highland indigenous organizations for a common political instrument was not considered because of interest differences concerning the use of land and natural resources. Indigenous lowland peasants see lowland territories as threatened by coca growers from the Andean valleys.

“Sus intereses no eran comunes. [...] El territorio es limitado y ambos tienen acceso al mismo territorio. Colonizadores y las comunidades de la CSUTCB y los interculturales necesitan utilizar [terrenos de] tierras bajas que tienen dueños y las reclaman para sí. Entonces más bien hay un conflicto por la tenencia del territorio.” (1)

Another reason for the non-foundation of a common political party of highland and lowland indigenous peoples was a cultural distance and maybe a sense of superiority of highland towards lowland indigenous leaders, who claim that the lowland peoples have not been involved in the political struggles of the highland peoples and the achievements made.

“Ellos son como nuestro hermano menor. [...] Hemos defendido lo que es el petróleo y todo eso. El oriente en esa defensa casi no ha habido.” (7)

Besides, highland and lowland indigenous peoples differ in their political cultures: While the leaders of the latter cultivated a cooperative style of negotiation, the highland indigenous activists are rather confrontational in their political demands (Schilling-Vacaflor 2010, Van Cott 2005).

As lowland indigenous peoples have barely been involved in the state – lose linkages to political parties, nearly no entanglement in transregional economy, lack of civil registration of large parts of the lowland indigenous population until the 2000s –, regional interests and power structures are more imminent than national matters.

“Más antes [...] nosotros los pueblos indígenas como que no nos metíamos en qué cosa más nos afectaba o no nos afectaba alguna política, porque como que no teníamos contacto con la sociedad ni el mercado básicamente, total nosotros en nuestra comunidad: mi papaya, mi guineo, mi caña, mi arroz, mi plátano, mi yucca, mi pescado y listo. No me falta para todos los días. Yo como, mis hijos y listo, no me falta nada [...], entonces yo no sé en qué me afectaban [...] los diferentes periodos gubernamentales, en otras palabras [...] ignorante pero feliz. No tenía ninguna fatiga de nada porque yo para comer no necesitaba un peso.” (15)

In spite of the important reforms of the 1990ies which satisfied parts of the indigenous movements' demands, the socioeconomic gap between indigenous and non-indigenous population prevailed (Patrinos/Psacharopoulos 1993). Indigenous communities continued to experience an invasion of their lands by state and private actors, the contamination of their soils and the loss of their livelihoods (Gigler 2009, Schilling-Vacaflor 2009). Poverty in the countryside augmented in this decade. The indigenous voters in both highlands and lowlands turned away from the MNR-MRTKL coalition and in 1997, Banzer's right-wing ADN won the elections in the dawn of a major socioeconomic crisis. The party formed a government with support of MIR and CONDEPA, which had increased its vote share amongst the highland indigenous voters again and received most of its votes from the Aymara (29%) and Quechua (10%), whereas its results amongst lowland indigenous voters remained poor. ADN had received high shares of votes from the lowland population, including the

indigenous voters. It looks paradox that the indigenous lowland population would support a party which was run by the traditional regional oligarchy and follows their interests. But regional seems to overlap ethnic identity and the relations with local power holders appear to be stronger than the ones with a nation state that has hardly made an appearance in indigenous lowland communities, who barely benefited from state policies.

“Eramos olvidados. [...] Los anteriores gobiernos e incluso ahorita [...] han sido los que más nos han perseguido, que nos han hecho [...] a un lado. [...] Es mentira [...] que queremos que no nos hagan caminos, que nos queremos morir ahí no más, que somos unos no contactados, que nosotros somos aislados porque nosotros queremos. No: Nos hace falta la presencia del Estado.” (11)

In that light, it could make sense that ADN founder General Banzer, who descended from a German family of large scale owners, was considered as “one of them” by the lowland – including the indigenous – population, as indigenous leaders confirm.

“Primero, era un general, como nosotros decimos, ‘camba’, propio de la región, entonces era comprensible de que tenía que haber una cuestión de simpatía, una cuestión de aglutinamiento de respaldo de voto por él, era algo novedoso. Dos: porque había de parte de ese general [...] un compromiso real con la región.” (15)

“Banzer fue uno de los dictadores en Bolivia [...]. A pesar de matar un montón de ciudadanos en su época de dictadura, [...] los pueblos indígenas [de tierras bajas] [...] le simpatizaron primero por ser una persona del oriente, no del altiplano, sino del oriente. Segundo porque él en su discurso y en su proyecto político [ofrecía] trabajo, la gente iba a tener trabajo, la gente ya no iba a sufrir de hambre, iba a tener techo.” (16)

Socioeconomic inequality and political exclusion provoked a growing dissatisfaction amongst the indigenous population with the prevailing political system and the conventional parties in the 1990ies. In spite of the obligatory suffrage since 1961, large parts of the overall indigenous population abstained from elections in the 1980ies and 1990es. In 1989, 62% of the lowland indigenous, 52% Aymara and 58% Quechua voters absented themselves from elections, in 1993 64% of the lowland indigenous, 42% Aymara and 48% Quechua voters and in 1997 22% lowland indigenous, 25% Aymara and 29% Quechua voters. The large numbers of absentees might be related to difficulties of reaching remote areas in the countryside due to poorly developed infrastructure, the lack of registration of many indigenous civilians at this time, but possibly also (looking at the variation of abstention in different elections and its relative congruence between highlands and lowlands) to the degree of political disenchantment amongst the indigenous population. The abstention rates were highest amongst lowland indigenous voters and only fell drastically from 2009 on, as figure 7 shows.

Since the 1990ies, there was a large social movement underway at national level, which comprised the indigenous organizations and the urban middle classes. It was going to enter formal politics in the new millennium, in order to replace the traditional elites from 2005 on. One of its products was the party today known as MAS, which was born out of an alliance between small political parties and civil society organizations, which had their roots mainly in the highlands and valleys, comprising Aymara and Quechua habitats (Zuazu 2009). It could rise thanks to the 1994 Law of Popular Participation and its introduction of municipal elections. MAS had its first (overwhelming) electoral successes in the municipalities of the Chapare valley and from there expanded to the national level (Van Cott 2003).

As the ADN government didn't respond to the prevailing needs of the mobilized population, the years around the turn of the millennium were marked by social riots. Until the 2002 elections, ADN had lost most of its support base, achieved only each 2% of the votes from Quechua and Aymara and 5% from lowland indigenous voters. It had its best results amongst non-indigenous voters with 10%.

MNR became the strongest force in parliament again with 22,5% of the votes, followed by the newcomer MAS with 20,9%. When looking at the vote distribution of the particular ethnic groups, we can at this point observe a gap between the two parties. MNR had accumulated the majority of the lowland indigenous peoples' (41%). MAS had gained good parts of the votes of the main highland peoples Aymara (20%) and Quechua (30%) and to a lesser extent of lowland indigenous peoples (10%). ADN as a rightist party was replaced by Nueva Fuerza Republicana (NFR). It also achieved high vote shares mainly from Aymara (19%), Quechua (16%) and far less from the lowland indigenous peoples (5%). A new indigenous party, MIP, which again aimed at the Aymara electorate, gained 18% of the Aymara votes, while only up to 2% from all other groups.

A political system based on corruption and favours to the advantage of the traditional elites and the praxis of coalition building across ideological and programmatic boundaries had stimulated the desire for a profound change. Indigenous parties appeared as political alternatives (Gúzman 2014). As the MNR government made no significant changes to its predecessor, the upheavals continued in the years after the 2002 elections, accompanied by a series of changes of government.

In 2005, MAS was able to achieve an overwhelming victory, reaching the absolute majority with 53,72% of the votes. After the implosion of the former political power structure, MAS had polled large parts of the votes of the highland indigenous peoples (Aymara 63%, Quechua 52%), likewise of the main lowland peoples (22%). A new right-wing civil association, Poder Democrático Social (PODEMOS), an ally of ADN, arose simultaneously and could attract the largest part of the lowland indigenous votes (45%) and substantial shares of Aymara (17%) and Quechua votes (each 30%). Another right-wing oppositional party, Frente de Unidad Nacional (UN), appeared, landed on the 3rd place and polled almost equal shares of indigenous highland and lowland votes. MNR occupied the 4th place and attracted lowland indigenous peoples' (17%) and other votes, but had lost the votes of the highland indigenous constituency to MAS, which provoked its disappearance in the 2009 elections.

[Figure 6 about here]

Figure 6 visualizes MAS' vote shares of Aymara, Quechua, the lowland indigenous peoples and others since 2002 until 2014. It illustrates its steady growth since its first participation in national elections amongst all ethnic groups until 2009. Thereafter it shows stagnation amongst lowland indigenous and others voters, compared to a decrease in Quechua voters and a sharp drop of Aymara votes.

MAS offered a political alternative, presenting itself as an inclusive indigenous party with a socialist background, promising to abolish the old elites – “decolonize the system” and “indianize the state” – and redistribute the country's resources (Schilling-Vacaflor 2010). As a difference to former indigenous parties, which had been based on the exclusive Aymaran Katarista philosophy and recruited its followers mainly amongst the Aymara, MAS was rooted in the country's main labour unions and indigenous organizations from highlands and lowlands and had supporters from highlands and lowlands at the beginning of its government (Van Cott 2005). Its “inclusivity” is frequently mentioned as one of its secrets of success (Madrid 2012). Nevertheless, their strongest supporters were the highland labour unions, represented by their umbrella organisation CSUTCB. MAS' politics were backed up by the Pact of Unity, an alliance of the country's main indigenous and civil society organizations, which has existed from 2005 onwards.⁷ The party's attempts to control and incorporate the country's social organizations provoked the withdrawal of CIDOB and CONAMAQ in 2011 and the breaking apart of both organizations into two wings, of which each one was co-opted by MAS, while the leaders of the non-official wings just like entire indigenous organizations of the lowlands have basically gone underground in recent years. The social movement that brought MAS to victory no longer exists, as it broke apart into its constituent organizations. While lowland

⁷ The Pact of Unity comprised CSUTCB, National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), CNMCIQB-Bartolina Sisa, Unionist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia (CSCIB), and CIDOB.

indigenous organizations could act freely under former governments, they have lived a process of dissociation with MAS, as their leaders have experienced persecution:

“Hemos sufrido recientemente una violación a nuestros derechos [...], que entraron aquí y se llevaron a nuestro presidente. Entonces [...] tenemos nosotros pendiente una demanda internacional, que estamos elaborando.” (11)

In contrast, indigenous leaders from CSUTCB, which recruits most of its members amongst Aymara and Quechua, continued to identify with MAS as “their” government in 2016:

“[...] Con la lucha de los campesinos, la CSUTCB [...] hemos fundado un instrumento político propio, lo que es [MAS-] IPSP – Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos. [...] Hemos conseguido a nuestra bandera política, [...] hemos podido participar en las elecciones y por eso ha ganado nuestro presidente Evo Morales. Como matriz y organización social tenemos un partido político [...] y nos está yendo bien: ¡Diez años de gobierno!” (7)

As a consequence of the persecution of lowland indigenous leaders, the differences in the voting behaviour of highland and lowland indigenous peoples have increased since the beginning of the MAS government. While its support by the large highland indigenous peoples continues to be high, the majority of lowland indigenous voters support oppositional right-wing parties, many of which are originated in the lowlands and their leaders involved in the regional economy.

A line of conflict which intensified during the MAS government is the rivalry between highland and lowland states (*departamentos*). The oil- and gas-rich lowland states – because of their geographical shape called the “Half-Moon” (“*Media Luna*”) – united in their demand for the autonomous administration of natural resources on their soils, more precisely the exclusivity of the revenues of natural resource exploitation. The central government in La Paz insisted on the necessity to share the revenues with the national state. The cleavage contains likewise a confrontation between economic elites. In the highlands it is the new Andean political elite, who were the offspring of a social movement composed by labour unionists and indigenous activists and reached government with MAS. In the lowlands it is the oligarchy of large landowners, who have the control over the region’s economy. The MAS government threatened to expropriate large land properties, nationalize private companies and redistribute the country’s wealth, which the lowland oligarchy observed with fear of losing their properties. Furthermore, the conflict had an ethnic dimension. It occurred between the new Andean elite seated in La Paz, called „collas“, many of whom identify themselves as indigenous, in spite of promoting a common national perspective. The lowlands are represented by the established regional oligarchy, called „cambas“ (and others), who emphasize their European provenance and denounce their exploitation by the central state. While the governmental elites promote cultural diversity, the lowlands are dominated by a homogenous „mestizo“ identity. Both sides managed to raise the support of the regional populations by promoting distinct regional identities around their political projects, with the difference that the highland government promoted a common national perspective, while lowland politicians advocated a regional segregation (Biggemann/Klimovich/Thomas 2014, Marca/Baigoria/Velarde 2014). The conflict intensified during the years of the constituent assembly and ceased when state autonomy was included in the 2009 constitution. But even though the content-related disagreements could be settled, a regional breach persisted and finds its repercussions in the different preferences of highland and lowland indigenous voters, the latter ones sticking to the regional centres of power.

The 2009 elections were greatly politicized and highly polarized between highlands and lowlands: MAS surpassed its former result, achieving 64,2% of the ballots, gaining large parts of the votes of the indigenous highland population (Aymara 80%, Quechua 66%) and even 47% of the non-indigenous votes, but a comparatively low share of 27% of the main indigenous lowland peoples’ votes. The majority of the latter gave their votes to an alliance of right-wing oppositional parties

named Plan Progreso para Bolivia-Convergencia Nacional (PPB-CN). PODEMOS had been dissolved in 2008 due to the non-fulfilment of legal requirements. PPB-CN turned out 2nd with 26,5% of the votes, achieving 59% of the lowland indigenous votes, compared to only 9% Aymara votes and 18% Quechua votes. The ballots were basically distributed between these two parties. All other parties reached one-digit results, as did third-placed UN with 5,7%. The abstention rate had dropped to 12%.

The relationship of MAS with indigenous organizations experienced severe disturbances in the following legislation. The frictions in the Pact of Unity and the legal persecution of indigenous leaders undermined MAS' credibility as defender of the country's indigenous population. Especially the relations of MAS with lowland indigenous peoples have degraded, who have had difficulties of pushing their interests through (Schilling-Vacaflor 2010). They criticize a lack of attention by the central government, which clearly distinguishes between numerically more and less powerful peoples and rarely reacts to requests for meetings with small indigenous peoples.

"[A los Ayoreo] No les dan pelota porque son pocos. En cambio los Guaraní llaman [al gobierno central] y no les contestan en la primera. En la segunda sí los contactan porque hay la presión y se acabó. Y no solamente lo hacen bajar al ministro: Al presidente lo hacen bajar." (9)

The so called TIPNIS conflict around the construction of a highway through indigenous territory and national park Isiboro-Sécure in 2011 illustrates MAS' position towards lowland indigenous interests. Local leaders of the TIPNIS region feared the invasion of their lands, e.g. by coca growers – "colonizers" – from the Chapare valley. They organized resistance under the leadership of Fernando Vargas. The lowland protesters gained solidarity from inside and outside the country and Morales was criticized for his attitude towards indigenous rights. The government had failed to respect the prior and informed consent of indigenous residents, as mandated by the 2009 constitution, before signing the construction contract with a Brazilian conglomerate and harshly suppressed the protest (seven deaths during the 2011 and 2012 marches) (Canessa 2014). Nevertheless, these policies did not affect lowland indigenous peoples' electoral behaviour in favour of parties supporting their cause.

MAS was again the outstanding winner of the 2014 elections with 61,4%. The strongest oppositional force was right-wing Unidad Demócrata (UD) with 24,2%, an alliance of UN and right-wing and liberal parties from Santa Cruz. The conservative Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC) landed on the 3rd place with 9% of the votes. The number of political parties competing in these elections had reduced to five, compared to 18 in 1985. MAS had basically established itself as the only relevant force in parliament. Its major support base were, again, the highland indigenous voters (Aymara: 70%, Quechua: 65%). The lowland indigenous support for MAS wasn't low either (48%). However, the lowland indigenous voters supported UD in far higher vote shares (29%) than Aymara and Quechua did (12 and 17% respectively). In spite of MAS' continuously high support by the highland indigenous peoples, the Aymara vote share for MAS had fallen by 10% since 2009. The withdrawal and splitting of CONAMAQ and the persecution of its leaders are likely to be responsible for the notable drop in the Aymara vote share for MAS.

Interestingly, the TIPNIS conflict neither had a negative effect on the lowland indigenous support for MAS, nor a positive effect on their support for the Green Party Bolivia (PVB), which was headed by the leader of the TIPNIS protest, Fernando Vargas. It reached 2,65% of the overall votes and no important difference between highland and lowland indigenous support for PVB could be registered. One of the three affected indigenous people on whose territory the highway was to be constructed, the Mojeño, did not noticeably support PVB, even though its leader Fernando Vargas himself was a Mojeño. Their support for PVB was even lower in comparison to Aymara or Guaraní. In spite of his regional origin and his activism as president of the TIPNIS sub-office, he was no member of the regional oligarchy and the lowland indigenous voters probably did not consider him an influential part of the regional power centres, to which they were loyal. Thus, programmatic or policy motives

seem to have had no significant impact on lowland indigenous voters' electoral decisions, as PVB's alternative political offer to MAS' repressive policies were not appealing to them.

Conclusions

Theories on de- and realignment can convincingly explain the shift of large parts of the voters from one party to another, as happened in the Bolivian case from the major political parties Movement of the National Revolution (MNR), Democratic Nationalist Action (ADN) and Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) to MAS. The unclear programmatic differentiation of formerly leftist parties like MNR or CONDEPA and their blurred party brands, due to their support of neoliberal economic reforms in the 1980ies and 1990ies and the formation of coalitions with programmatically foreign parties, lead to a destabilization of the party system and eventually a dealignment. Their behaviour during the critical juncture – the socio-economic crisis around the turn of the new millennium –, the loss of their credibility and identification in their electorates provoked the breakdown of the political system, the victory of MAS, a renovation of the political landscape and a relocation of large amounts of votes, that is, a realignment to MAS and a new right-wing opposition.

The cleavage approach is equally very revealing when analysing ethnic voting in Bolivia. The regional cleavage in Bolivian society is clearly reflected in indigenous peoples' voting behaviour. This cleavage is stratified into three lines of conflict: 1) the rivalry between the central state and the lowland region on the revenues of the extraction of natural resources, 2) the opposing interests between the new political-economic elite in La Paz and the lowland elite, and 3) a conflict between ethnic groups, namely the "indigenous" elite in the highlands and the "mestizo"/"wite" elite in the lowlands. Both managed to gather electoral support by their respective regional populations. This cleavage existed before MAS came to power, has deepened since the beginning of its government in 2006 and found its repercussions in differences between highland and lowland indigenous peoples' electoral choices.

Distinct indigenous identity seems to have minor weight for the explanation of differences between indigenous peoples. It appears to have the largest impact on the electoral choices of the highland Aymara people, who show a tendency to prefer parties that promote Aymara identity. It must be specified that Aymara identity is more politicized than other indigenous identities in Bolivia and goes along with the development of a particular political ideology and a political struggle of resistance. However, regional identity might serve as a better explanation for distinct indigenous voting preferences, especially in the lowlands. Lowland indigenous voters appear to be strongly influenced by regional politicians' appeals and their sense of regional belonging seems to have a major impact on their electoral choices.

Clientelistic practices and networks are hard to prove. But material incentives, namely offers by regional politicians, and collective electoral decision making are likely to account for indigenous peoples' vote choices and differences in the voting patterns between highland and lowland indigenous peoples to a larger extent. Highland indigenous peoples' organizations with their close ties to MAS have an impact on highland indigenous peoples' electoral decisions. The latter show a greater orientation towards parties that are supported by their organizations. In turn, lowland indigenous voters show a more pronounced orientation towards parties with the best offer for the regional indigenous communities, disconnected from political agendas, ideologies or proximity to their interest organizations.

Political agendas and policies have had an impact on the electoral behaviour of indigenous peoples in Bolivia. Even though policies in the observed lapse of time have not led to a noticeable increase in ethnic voting, previous policies have had their repercussions on distinct party preferences of highland and lowland indigenous peoples. While highland indigenous peoples show a preference for leftist political parties, which can be attributed to MNR's pro-highland indigenous policies in the 1950ies, lowland indigenous peoples have a tendency to vote for rightist political parties, which were the first to politically involve them in the Peasant-Military-Pact.

Theories on social movements cannot only help to analyse the rise of indigenous parties, such as MAS used to be initially. In the Bolivian case, it is revealing to observe the parallel development of the breaking apart of the indigenous movement during MAS' government and the increase in ethnic voting at the same time. Consequently, the social movements approach can account for parts of the differences in the voting behaviour of indigenous peoples.

Despite MAS' drop in indigenous rhetoric, the share of highland indigenous voters who supported MAS increased. Hence, discourse, which in large parts of the literature on ethnic politics is mentioned in relation to the emergence and success of recent indigenous parties, proves to have low relevance for the explanation of the variation in indigenous peoples' voting behaviour in Bolivia.

As institutional hurdles for indigenous participation in the legislature reduced shortly before MAS came to government, but ethnic voting increased during MAS' government, institutional obstacles cannot explain differences in indigenous peoples' voting behaviour. Accordingly, theories on the institutional design don't seem to take us further when trying to clarify the reasons for ethnic voting in the case of Bolivia.

The understanding of linkages between political parties and voters still has a number of white spots. Especially when speaking generically about large groups of voters, like indigenous peoples, it might be necessary to have a closer look and eventually differentiate between them. This is why aggregation of ethnic groups must be handled with care, as one might oversee variation. The present paper contributes to the mentioned discussion, taking into consideration the complexity of indigenous peoples in Bolivia. This paper also contributes to the body of knowledge on the linkages of marginalized groups with political parties and of their participation in political systems.

As this paper observes an extended period of 29 years, it is able to look at several influential variables in the variation of ethnic voting over time. This approach must naturally remain at the surface of specific factors of influence, which provide information on the motivations of voters, and cannot dive deeper into them, which remains as a task for future research. It might be revealing to deeper investigate the impact of clientelistic networks and practices on differences in the electoral behaviour of indigenous peoples.

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Figure 1: Validation of ecological inference estimates with survey data

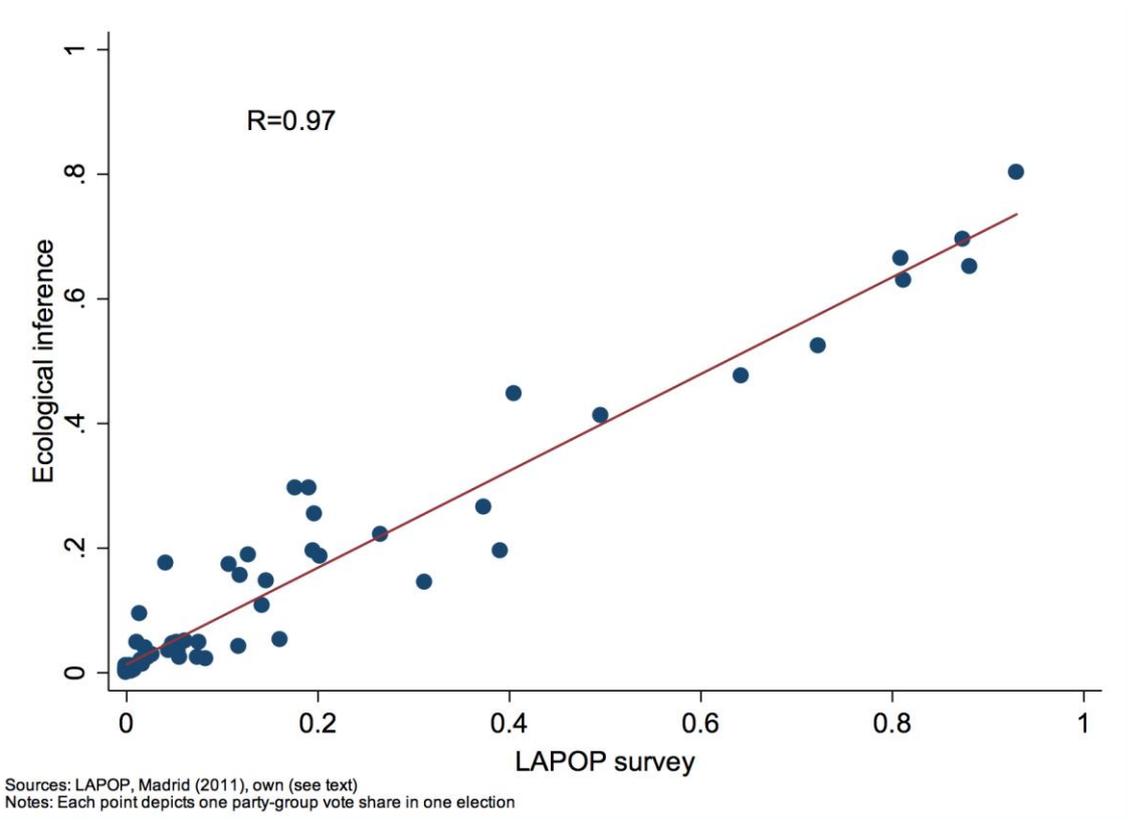


Figure 2: Estimated vote share of MNR by ethnic group

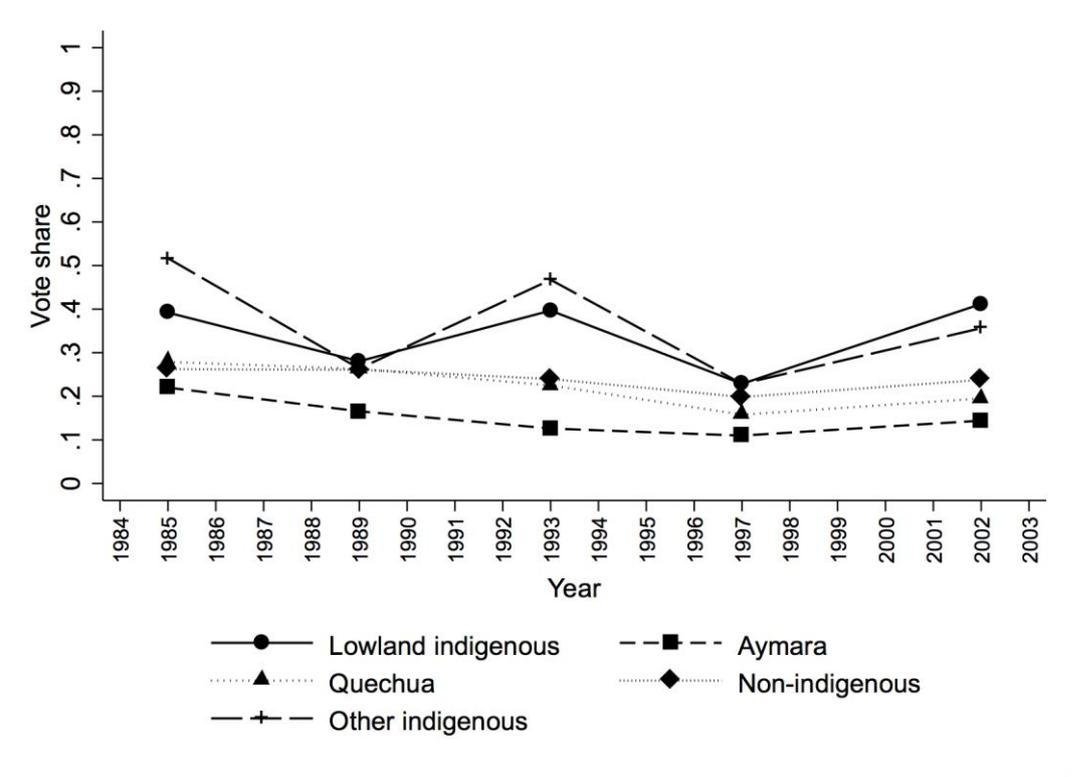


Figure 3: Estimated vote share of ADN by ethnic group

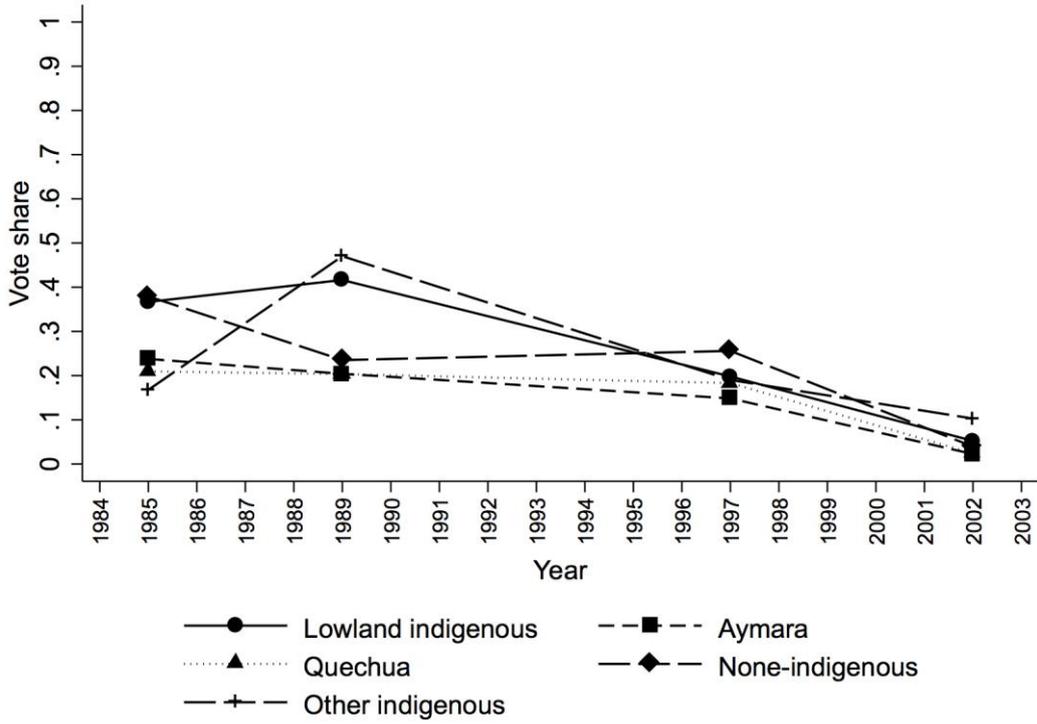


Figure 4: Estimated vote share of MIR by ethnic group

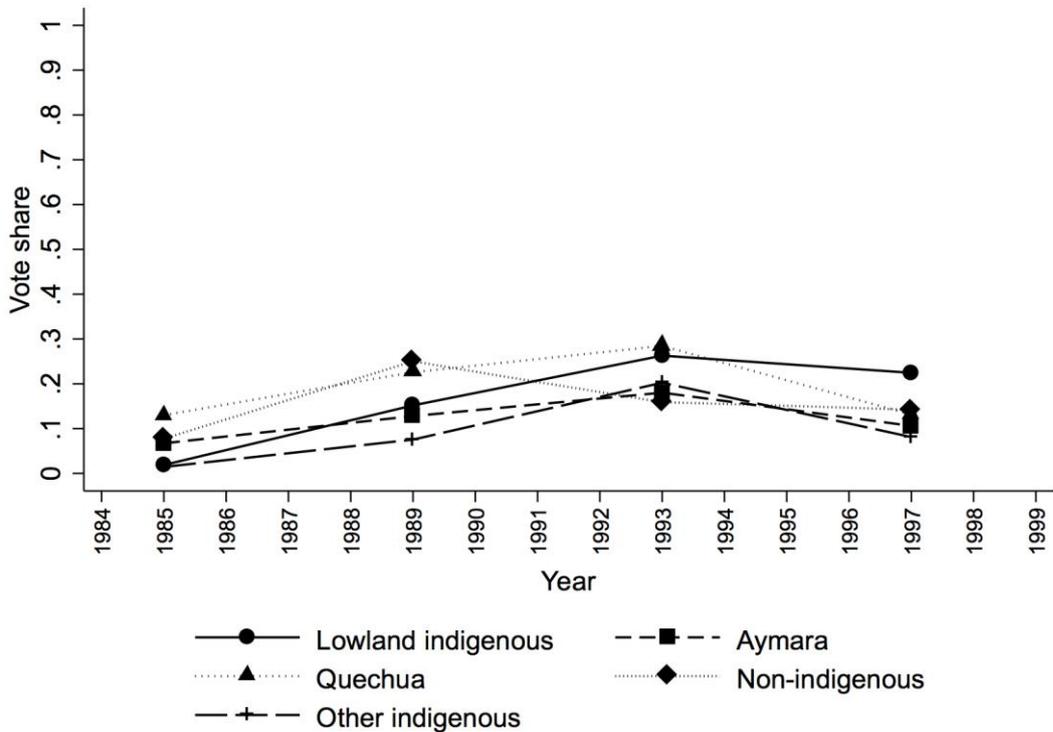


Figure 5: Estimated vote share of CONDEPA by ethnic group

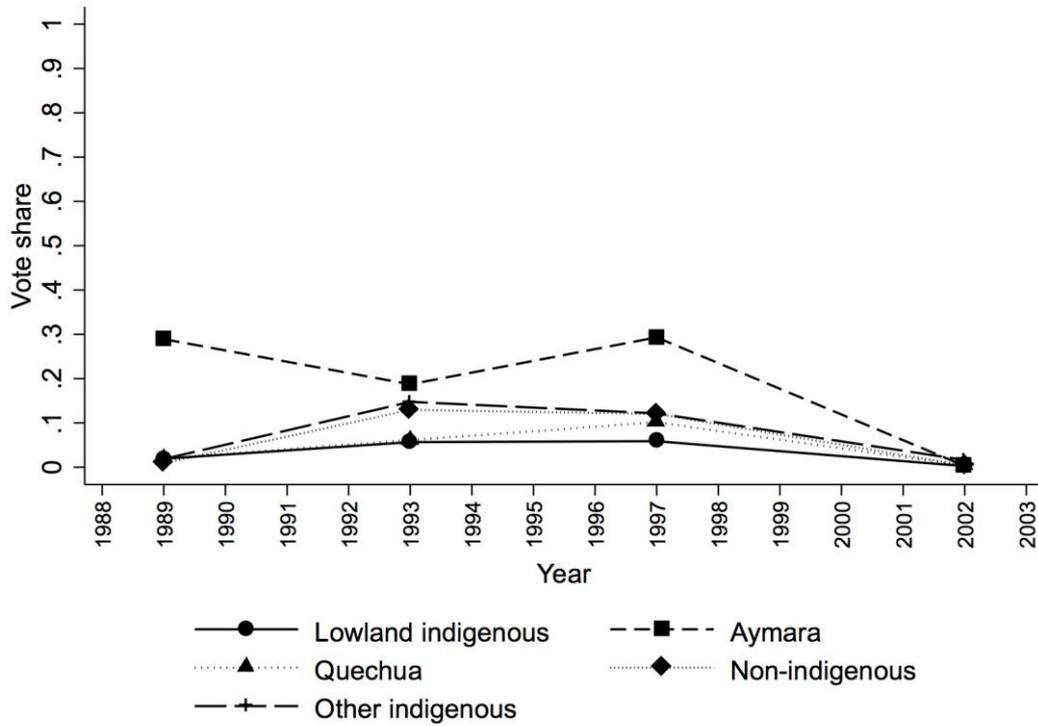


Figure 6: Estimated vote share of MAS by ethnic group

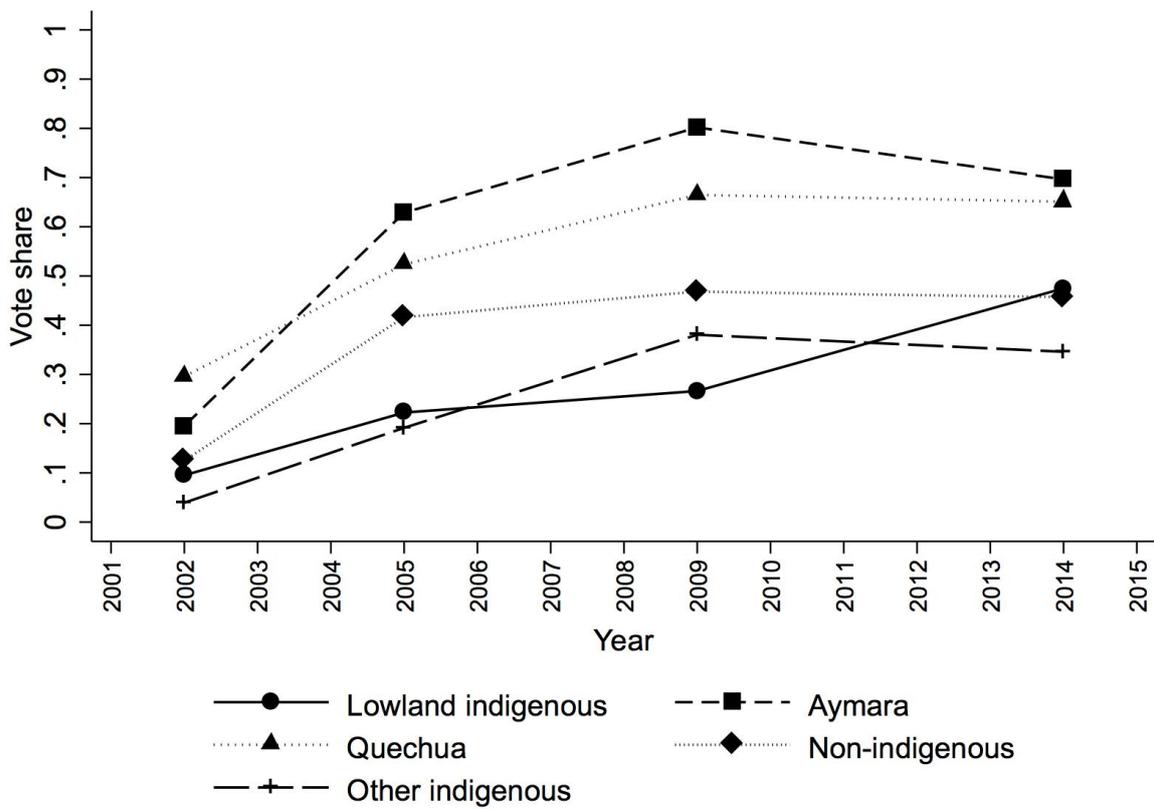


Figure 7: Estimated turnout as difference between people in voting age and voters by ethnic group

