

**Oppression, Activism, and the Political Participation of Indigenous Peoples:  
A Case Study in Yucatán, Mexico**

by

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Indigenous peoples in countries around the world are known to suffer disproportionately from a lack of political rights, socioeconomic inequality, and inadequate access to necessary resources. Such inequalities can be clearly seen in the case of Mexico, where, in many ways, colonial legacies still reign over the country's sociopolitical structure and systemically limit the power of indigenous peoples. The deeply institutionalized nature of these power structures raises the question of what effect it has had on the political power of different ethnic groups, and if these groups interact differently with their government. This curiosity led me to conduct field research in Yucatán, Mexico, to investigate if there is any distinct difference in the political attitudes and levels of political participation between indigenous and non-indigenous people.

Through this paper, I describe how I arrived at this question and propose two conflicting hypotheses that could potentially provide a response. I initially expected that indigenous respondents would exhibit more negative political sentiment and lower levels of political participation. However, my results indicate the opposite, which led me to develop a new argument entirely. My concluding argument is that, in most cases, indigenous peoples will likely participate in politics at a lower rate and show more negative political sentiment—however, there are a few particularities in the case of Yucatán that reverse this trend of nonparticipation. These particularities are: low levels of ethnic inequality, low political saliency of ethnicity, recent increases in substantive representation, and a unique sense of pride in indigeneity. I argue that these characteristics heighten participation and improve sentiment, making Yucatán an exception

to the overall trend of nonparticipation. This has profound implications for indigenous politics, particularly in other states or regions that exhibit similar characteristics. Through this paper, I discuss my research question in greater depth, and how this study has led me one step closer to identifying an answer.

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## Preface

I am extremely grateful for all of the assistance that I have had throughout the research and writing processes for this BPhil thesis. I am particularly thankful to the Center for Latin American Studies' Seminar and Field Trip Program, as without this program I would not have had the opportunity or the guidance necessary to conduct international field research abroad as an undergraduate. I am also grateful to the Department of Political Science for selecting me for the Gary J. Rathburn International Research award, which provided me with the financial assistance to partake in the Seminar and Field Trip program in Mexico in 2018.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Indigenous peoples in countries around the world are known to suffer disproportionately from a lack of political rights, socioeconomic inequality, and inadequate access to necessary resources. Such inequalities can be clearly seen in the case of Mexico, where, in many ways, colonial legacies still reign over the country's sociopolitical structure and systemically limit the power of indigenous peoples. The deeply institutionalized nature of these power structures raises the question of what effect it has had on the political power of different ethnic groups, and if these groups interact differently with their government. This curiosity led me to conduct field research in Yucatán, Mexico, to investigate if there is any distinct difference in the political attitudes and levels of political participation between indigenous peoples and non-indigenous or mestizo people. Through this paper, I describe how I arrived at this question and propose two conflicting hypotheses that could potentially provide a response. I expected that indigenous respondents would exhibit more negative political sentiment and lower levels of political participation. However, my results indicate the opposite, which led me to develop a new argument around the particularities of the case of Yucatán that produce this effect. Through this paper, I will describe how I came to this question, and how this study has led me one step closer to finding an answer.

## **1.1 Background**

Throughout modern world history and through myriad different mechanisms, indigenous peoples around the world have experienced various forms of discrimination and oppression economically, socially, and politically. Though this fact has been a more prominent part of the narrative in countries with large indigenous populations such as Bolivia or Guatemala, it is unequivocally an extant part of the history in countries around the world including the United

States, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea, to name a few. Though the history varies by region and country, since the colonial era indigenous peoples around the globe have fallen victim to atrocities including but not limited to forced labor, forced sterilization, and genocide. These acts of aggression have had a significant impact on the demographic makeup of some countries. In fact, many countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, and smaller countries in the Caribbean, would have large native populations today if not for the mass decimations and displacements of these groups.

Fortunately, as history has progressed and as countries around the globe have begun on staggered paths toward democratization, instances of these atrocities have become much less prevalent. However, in many cases the sociopolitical hierarchies that allowed for these events are still in place and are still actively engaged in suppressing the power of these groups. Today, however, the obstacles to equality and true political inclusion for indigenous peoples tend to be more subtle. According to a 2016 World Bank report, average rates of poverty among indigenous peoples in Latin America are around *twice* as high as those for the rest of the population (Calvo-González, 2016). However, this trend is not limited to Latin America. Indigenous peoples around the world experience disproportionately high rates of poverty and a lower standard of living overall (Eversole, McNeish, & Cimadamore, 2005), with limited access to basic resources such as education or health care. Save for a few exceptions, indigenous peoples around the world have lower life expectancies, higher infant mortality rates, and lower rates of enrollment in secondary and higher education when compared to the rest of the population (Anderson et al., 2016).

Disproportionately high levels of poverty and a lower standard of living indirectly restrict indigenous peoples' ability to access the resources necessary to actively participate in the political sphere (Krishna, 2008). Additionally, rather consistently in countries around the world,

indigenous peoples experience lower levels of descriptive political representation (González Galván, 2008; Hoffay & Rivas, 2016), and indigenous rights or interests are often left out of political discourse. Given Latin America's notoriety for the practice of clientelism, indigenous peoples in the region are also disproportionately targeted by corrupt populations seeking political support in exchange for employment, resources, or cash handouts.

When neoliberal economic reforms began to sweep across the region in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, many, including indigenous peoples, were hopeful that their conditions would improve. However, contrary to optimistic associations of neoliberalism with equality and democracy, the poorest populations of countries around the world continued to bear the brunt of exacerbated poverty and economic inequality, coupled with new obstacles to collective organization (Collins, Di Leonardo, & Williams, 2008). Neoliberalism also brought new issues to the table such as the privatization of resources, the redistribution of land, and the politicization of ethnic cleavages, that had especially profound impacts on indigenous peoples. In the specific case of Mexico, neoliberal reforms required that *ejidos*, or communally-owned parcels of land, be redistributed with the intention of increasing agricultural productivity. Such land reforms, coupled with the privatization of necessary resources such as water in the case of Bolivia, were particularly threatening to indigenous ideals of community and autonomy. By privatizing and reallocating these resources, neoliberal governments and transnational corporations were effectively depreciating the already limited rights that indigenous peoples had until then maintained.

It was in this context that many indigenous peoples were particularly motivated to mobilize together and demand change in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the past, marginalized indigenous communities across the region had organized within larger movements that were generally aligned with labor or class-based struggles. However, these efforts tended to be

unsuccessful in garnering significant attention or causing substantive legislative changes related to the specific demands of those indigenous groups. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that indigenous political and social movements emancipated from earlier struggles and established the legitimacy necessary to make considerable changes in their respective national polities. There are a few theories that contribute to the scholarly consensus regarding *why* exactly these identity-based indigenous movements emerged simultaneously at this point in history (Armstrong-Fumero, 2013; Rice, 2012; Singh, 2018; Yashar, 1998; Yashar, 1999). One part of the narrative is certainly that this period marked the first time that these indigenous groups had separated from broader movements based on class that didn't fully represent their interests (Rice, 2012; Yashar, 1998). As indigenous movements separated from this class-based struggle, they formed their own identity-based movements that aligned a politicized indigeneity with shared criticisms of the economic and political structures that had worked to limit their opportunities as indigenous peoples (Yashar, 1998). During this period from the late 1980s to early 2000s, to which I refer as the Global Indigenous Movement, many indigenous organizations in various countries did exactly this; a few famous examples are the Zapatista uprising in Mexico in 1994, or the conception of the Pan-Maya movement in Guatemala in the early 1990s.

Another explanation for the sudden emergence of indigenous political movements during this era is that it was a direct response to the worsened conditions caused by neoliberal reforms (Holzner, 2015; Rice, 2012; Yashar, 1998; Yashar, 1999), which included the privatization of industries and resources, decreased government spending on welfare, and the attraction of foreign investment. In many cases, these reforms also led state governments to reduce existing protections of land inhabited and operated by indigenous communities. Such neoliberal reforms actively threatened many of the ideals on which emerging indigenous movements were based,

such as autonomy, land rights, and environmentalism. Many Latin American indigenous movements during this time therefore adopted a markedly anti-neoliberal flare, perhaps most notably in Mexico and Bolivia. The evidence strongly suggests that the neoliberal reforms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century played a significant role in the sudden politicization of indigeneity and the concurrent formation of indigenous organizations around the world.

As these neoliberal reforms continued to exacerbate existing inequalities and disproportionately affect marginalized groups, many countries around the world were simultaneously transitioning into democratic societies. This progression towards democracy was associated with the expansion of citizenship rights and other political freedoms. Thus arose a paradox in which indigenous peoples were disempowered by neoliberal reforms, yet at the same time given new opportunities to mobilize to improve their conditions. Therefore, although political mobilization may have been hindered in some ways through socioeconomic oppression and other factors associated with neoliberalism, these reforms provided a sort of ammunition for indigenous groups—and the new political opportunities provided by democratization provided new avenues through which they could challenge their conditions.

Emergent indigenous political movements, coupled with rising social movements such as that of *indigenismo* which inspired a newfound pride in indigenous identity, attracted international attention and inspired related movements across the globe. And, to a great degree, these new identity-based political movements *did* initiate many of the political goals that they sought. Many became their own political parties, such as CONAIE in Ecuador or *El Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) in Bolivia. In many countries, including Bolivia and New Zealand, quotas in the legislatures or judiciaries were established to ensure a minimum standard for representation for major indigenous groups. Indigenous human rights were incorporated into the

constitutional and legal frameworks of most countries, and leaders throughout Latin America developed a regional system to establish human rights standards for the entire region to abide by (Ignacio Martinez, 2011). Similar indigenous movements and related accomplishments transpired as far as Oceania and Scandinavia, leading scholars to consider this trend of indigenous mobilization a *global* movement rather than a regional one limited geographically to Latin America (Morgan, 2007; Singh, 2018). The global nature of this movement was largely legitimized by its recognition by the International Labor Organization when it adopted the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention in 1989, the first international treaty to exclusively address the rights of indigenous peoples. This treaty, along with many others established by the UN since, made an active effort to establish a universal standard of indigenous rights by solidifying it into international law; and, even if the terms of these treaties are not exercised in practice, they have at least succeeded in recognizing the legitimacy of these standards and bringing the issue to the political agendas of countries around the world.

## **1.2 The question within these two processes**

The undeniable successes of the Global Indigenous Movement may lead some to assume that these indigenous movements succeeded in achieving their goals, or that the fight is in some way over. However, despite the substantial changes that these movements initiated, they fell short of resolving the structural problems that hinder indigenous peoples from achieving the same social, political, and economic opportunities as their white or non-indigenous counterparts. As aforementioned, indigenous peoples continue to struggle disproportionately with the effects of economic inequality, poverty, and lack of basic resources. Though the described movements were largely successful in establishing equal political rights on paper, persisting systemic problems continue to hinder the ability for indigenous peoples to exercise these rights in practice.

Considering the substantial improvements associated with the Global Indigenous Movement, and the nonetheless prevailing systemic obstacles to equality of opportunity, a question remains: has the political situation for these groups truly improved, or have these changes only been superficial?

In exploring the existing research, I am particularly interested in understanding how these conditions of poverty and socioeconomic inequality, in tandem with the recent changes of the Global Indigenous Movement, have contributed to the position that indigenous peoples play today in their respective political spheres. The collective narrative of these indigenous peoples around the world, which includes their systemic marginalization and oppression, has led some to assume that indigenous people would be less active in their respective polities. The conventional wisdom proposes that those subject to such systemic oppression and those with restricted access to basic resources are less likely to participate in politics (Gallego, 2007; Krishna, 2008). This literature suggests that indigenous peoples should participate less in their political systems than the rest of the population, and that this discrepancy should be stronger in countries with more severe inequalities or more profound histories of oppression. On the other hand, however, the indigenous movements of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century certainly inspired a certain political fervor, and the positive institutional and political changes that resulted from the Global Indigenous Movement established new avenues for the participation and political engagement of indigenous peoples. These recent changes imply that indigenous peoples may be *more* politically engaged than ever before, either because they are motivated by the existence of indigenous movements and organizations, or because participation is simply more feasible today.

I find my research question within these contradicting assumptions. In the midst of these two seemingly conflicting global processes—one of oppression and one of mobilization—I am



driven to find where they intersect to constitute the state of indigenous politics today. I seek to understand how indigenous peoples today fit into their respective political systems, given the extent to which these two processes have impacted each situation differently, and the extent to which their contradictory theoretical outcomes have manifested. Thus, the overarching question of my study arises: To what extent do indigenous peoples participate in their political systems, and how does this relate to the political participation of their non-indigenous counterparts? If they do participate at different levels, what situational factors have caused this? And, to what extent can the participatory behavior of indigenous peoples be linked to their experiences within the global processes of oppression and mobilization?

The literature is quite extensive on the various indigenous movements of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and on how these movements have translated to international accords and standards to improve indigenous human rights. There is also a fair amount of literature regarding the link between factors such as ethnic cleavages, socioeconomic oppression, and low political participation. The research on present-day trends in indigenous political participation, however, is sparse, and that which does exist is contradictory and incomplete. The existing literature on indigenous political participation either only analyzes very specific cases and fails to address greater implications, or it makes broad generalizations without considering the particularities of different cases. Additionally, this research fails to make a connection between the broader global processes at play, such as oppression and/or global political movements, and the current state of indigenous politics. Therefore, though there are studies and theories surrounding the topic of my broader question, they are fairly divided and scattered, and fail to construct a coherent understanding of both the current trends and the larger global processes behind them. It is precisely because of this gap in the literature that I aspire to add new data, and use the existing

research to supplement a cohesive argument regarding the processes of oppression and mobilization, and how they have produced today's trends in indigenous politics.

Though I yearn to find the truth behind these questions in full, I recognize that I only have the ability to fill in a small piece of this greater puzzle. In an attempt to do exactly this, I conducted field research in the state of Yucatán, Mexico, through anonymous surveys with local individuals and in-person interviews with experts and politicians from the area. Using this survey and interview data, along with secondary literature on the politics of Latin America, Mexico, and specifically of Yucatán, I attempt to fill the defined gap in the existing literature. In order to begin this research, I first identified my research question, a much more narrow and case-specific version of the broader questions proposed earlier:

*To what extent do indigenous peoples in Yucatán participate in their political system? How does this differ (if at all) from participation levels among non-indigenous peoples?*

In answering this research question, I hope to gain not only further knowledge of the political trends in the specific case of Yucatán, but I also seek a deeper insight of how these global processes of oppression and marginalization have affected different groups in different parts of the world, and why. In reaching this understanding, I hope to contribute to the scholarly literature a greater understanding of how these processes impact political behavior, and what circumstances can enhance or impede this connection between the global processes and the present situation. In addition to this question, which is the core of my research, I propose a supplementary question, meant to provide a sort of explanation for the findings of the first:

*What is the general attitude towards the government in Yucatán? Is there any difference in political opinion between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents?*

Throughout this paper, when I use the term ‘political participation,’ I am referring to an individual’s participation in political activities ranging from being politically informed, to voting in elections, to running for political office. To clarify what I mean by an increase or decrease in political participation, however, it is necessary to differentiate between different forms of participation that are conducted in distinct ways. For this reason, I separate political participation into two general categories: ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ participation<sup>1</sup>. In this study, when I refer to political participation or positive political activities, I am referring to *positive* forms of political participation. In this context, ‘positive’ political participation refers to participation that involves working through or negotiating with existing institutions/organizations with the objective of influencing political outcomes. For example, voting in elections, participating in a political campaign, or running for office would fit into this category of ‘positive’ participation, since these are all activities that necessitate cooperation with formal political institutions (e.g. political parties, the state, interest groups). ‘Negative’ political participation, on the other hand, refers to more assertive methods of participation meant to achieve a political objective urgently. This category of ‘negative’ political participation generally encompasses activities associated with direct action, such as protesting or striking. It is important to distinguish between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ forms of political participation because these different types of activities are executed in distinct ways, and often have different sentiments behind them.

### **1.3 Finding an Answer**

Amid this two-part research question, it appears that there are two distinct directions in which this research may go. For this reason, I create two separate hypotheses to frame my

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of this categorization, consult Appendix B.

research, one of which reflects my initial expectations when I began this study. Generally, the conventional wisdom in the field of Political Science suggests that political attitudes and political participation are positively related (Almond & Verba, 1963; Milner, 2002; Reichert, 2016). For the purposes of my study, I will choose to uphold this assumption and group the hypotheses for both of these research questions together. The first hypothesis, or Hypothesis A, is as follows: Indigenous peoples in the state of Yucatán will exhibit lower levels of (1) political participation, and (2) overall more negative political sentiment when compared with their non-indigenous counterparts.

This first hypothesis, which I initially predicted would be true, is informed by an understanding of the region's extensive history of oppression of indigenous peoples by other ethnic groups and ruling classes, and the logic that this may lead indigenous peoples today to view their government in a more negative light. This hypothesis therefore poses a theoretical argument in favor of the power of the historical process of oppression, and the negative impact that this may have had on indigenous peoples in Yucatán. Ultimately disproven through my study, Hypothesis A suggests that the gains made during the Global Indigenous Movement did not have the effect of increasing participation by indigenous peoples in the formal political sphere.

Some scholars, however, would be critical of this hypothesis and argue that, no, the positive changes associated with the Global Indigenous Movement, along with increasing democratic opportunity, *should* have resulted in higher levels of political engagement among Mexico's marginalized indigenous groups. For this reason, I developed an alternative hypothesis, Hypothesis B, which would theorize the opposite of the first: Hypothesis B: Indigenous peoples in the state of Yucatán will exhibit statistically equivalent rates of (1) political participation, and

(2) similar trends in political opinion as their non-indigenous counterparts. In contrast to the first hypothesis, Hypothesis B provides a theoretical argument in favor of the global process of activism, and the substantial gains that the Global Indigenous Movement has had over the counteractive process of oppression. This argument would suggest that current rates of political participation among indigenous peoples are *not* negatively impacted by their historical and continuing oppression, and that perhaps these groups are not as oppressed or underrepresented in the political realm as some might argue.

In order to test these two hypotheses and take a step towards answering my research questions, I conducted surveys and interviews in various locations throughout the state of Yucatán. Through these written surveys and in-person interviews, I asked participants questions relating to their demographic background, political attitudes, and the ways that they interact with their political system. I then conducted a statistical analysis of the survey results and reviewed how they confirmed or contradicted the information gathered from the interviews. However, to my surprise, the data from these surveys largely contradicted both parts of Hypothesis A, and even surpassed some of the expectations of Hypothesis B. To the first point of political participation, indigenous respondents reported to vote at *higher* rates, and be more politically informed on average. For the second variable, which concerns political sentiment, there was little difference in political opinion between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents, although indigenous respondents did exhibit a higher preference for the local government. Overall, these results disproved my initial hypothesis, suggesting that indigenous peoples are *not* any more likely to abstain from politics; instead, it appears that they are just as likely, or in some cases even *more* likely to participate when compared with non-indigenous or mestizo peoples.

These findings were largely contradicted my initial expectations, and offered rather significant empirical support to my alternative hypothesis. However, I found it dubious that these statistics would be representative of political engagement and sentiment in many other parts of the world, given the extent to which many indigenous peoples continue to be systemically oppressed and marginalized by their political systems. For this reason, I chose to delve further into the literature on the specific political culture and history of the state of Yucatán in search of an explanation for these findings. Ultimately, I developed an argument that essentially synthesizes these two initial hypotheses and provides a plausible explanation for the results found in my study. I argue that, in most circumstances, historical political conditions and persisting socioeconomic inequalities should theoretically lead to a more negative political outlook, and subsequently lower levels of political participation for indigenous peoples.

However, there are certain factors that are unique to the case of Mexico, and to Yucatán in particular, that have had the effect of *reversing* this tendency and generating the opposite result. The particularities that produced this result are as follows: low ethnic inequality, the low political saliency of ethnicity, recent increases in substantive representation, and the unique atmosphere around indigeneity in the state of Yucatán. Due to these case-specific characteristics, indigenous peoples in Yucatán do not exhibit lower levels of political engagement, even though this may be the situation in most cases around the world. This also means that, if other states in Mexico or in other parts of the world happen to share some of these specific characteristics, they may exhibit political behaviors similar to those uncovered in this study.

In the next chapter of this thesis, I will provide a more thorough background of the specific history and political context of Mexico, and of the state of Yucatán in particular. I will then present my literature review and describe how the existing literature on the topic of

indigenous political participation is both contradictory and incomplete, and how my research study seeks to fill this void. In the third chapter, I will describe in detail the surveys and interviews that I conducted in Yucatán, and the results gathered from this research. Next, in the fourth chapter, I will discuss the conclusions and implications of these data results, and propose an informed argument regarding indigenous political participation in Mexico, and the particularities of the state of Yucatán that can explain these results. The fifth and final chapter will present an overview of the arguments discussed, and a conclusion detailing some of the greater implications of my findings.

Through the entirety of this discussion and analysis, I hope to find a point of intersection between the two major global processes described: that of oppression, and that of political mobilization. I seek to understand how, in the case of Yucatán, these processes intersect, and how they have worked to sculpt the present political situation for indigenous peoples in the state. This analysis, though specifically centered around the case of Yucatán in Mexico, has potentially much more profound regional and/or global implications. This research study has the potential to contribute new insight into the way that global processes of oppression and activism impact politics in different parts of the world, and what specific contextual characteristics can change the extent of these impacts. Developing a broader understanding of political participation, and how it is impacted by larger political processes, is crucial for the field of Political Science; it is necessary in any growing democracy to discern the extent to which the population is active and represented in the political system. This is especially important in the case of minority groups such as indigenous peoples, who have an extensive history of political oppression and/or exclusion. This research study also contributes greatly to the field of Global Studies, since it provides an examination of global trends, and how they may have impacted the political situation

in different parts of the world with different contextual characteristics. Overall, this study has potentially profound implications for anyone living in our globalized world; regardless of political background or country of allegiance, it is imperative as a member of our interconnected society to understand the extent to which different global processes have impacted its most oppressed and marginalized members.



## 2.0 Background and Literature Review

### 2.1 Background: Mexico

In order to explore the existing literature and to understand the extent to which it applies to the case of Mexico and the specific case of Yucatán, it is necessary to first provide a brief background of indigenous peoples in Mexico, and the current political situation in the country. Mexico is considered to have the largest indigenous population in the world within its borders, and the groups within this umbrella term ‘indigenous peoples’ are incredibly diverse. Just within the borders of Mexico, there are dozens of different major indigenous ethnic groups, with an estimated 68 languages spoken between them. Among the largest language groups are Náhuatl, Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Otomí, each of which has different subgroups within it. Although the proportion of indigenous peoples is relatively low at around 10-12% of the population, since the country’s population is so large this means that it has the largest absolute number of indigenous peoples out of any country in the world. This population is not evenly dispersed throughout the country, however; a vast majority of Mexico’s indigenous peoples reside in the states to the country’s south and southeast. A few of the Mexican states with the largest indigenous populations are Oaxaca, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, and Yucatán. With more than half of *yucatecos* speaking an indigenous language, Yucatán has one of the highest concentrations of indigenous language speakers in the country.

Many scholars have noted that, when compared to other countries with large indigenous populations, ethnicity does not appear to be a particularly salient political issue in many parts of Mexico (Armstrong-Fumero, 2013; Gabbert, 2004; Mattiace, 2009). Throughout their work, these authors have observed that indigeneity is often considered a rather fluid concept in Mexico, with terms like *indígena*, *indio*, or *mestizo* carrying ambiguous meanings and dynamic

connotations. Armstrong-Fumero (2013) emphasizes that, because of the vague connotations associated with these terms, and because of a relative absence of identity-based political movements in many regions, indigenous labels do not carry much political weight in much of Mexico. Though the saliency of ethnic identity is a country-wide phenomenon, the extent likely varies by region. Armstrong-Fumero (2013), Gabbert (2004), and Mattiace (2009) all note that the fluidity of ethnic identity is particularly evident in the state of Yucatán, which will end up being a decisive factor in the rates of political participation observed in my results.

In many ways, Mexico's colonial history closely resembles that of many other countries in the region that were under Spanish rule. Mexico gained independence in 1821, but for decades after independence indigenous peoples throughout Mexico were subject to an oppressive *hacienda* labor system that was primarily controlled by the wealthy elite of European background. In the case of Yucatán, the owners of these haciendas, known as *hacendados*, produced henequen (a fiber from the agave plant) using the cheap labor of Mayan farmers. The henequen industry comprised a massive part of Yucatán's economy until the 1980s, and was predominantly dependent on the work of the indigenous farmers, who were paid extremely low wages in a system often equated to slavery (Eiss, 2010). This was just one way in which indigenous Maya peasants in the region were negatively affected by neoliberal reforms in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Another detrimental part of these reforms included the loss of *ejidos*, or communally-owned areas of agricultural land. The *ejido* system, which was implemented in the favor of landless peasants during the Mexican Revolution, continues to be crucially important to indigenous and *campesino* people in the major agricultural regions of Mexico. Following the adoption of this system in the early 1900s, the ownership of these land areas provided the country's indigenous peoples with a certain degree of self-autonomy, and the ability to make a

living for themselves. When the neoliberal reforms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century—and specifically the adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—allowed for the privatization of these lands, it enraged Mexico’s indigenous communities and only fueled increasing discontent with the economic reforms.

In the case of Mexico, the neoliberal reforms of the late 1900s were undeniably the catalyst for indigenous activism. Perhaps one of the most famous indigenous political movements associated with the Global Indigenous Movement was the Zapatista uprising, which took place on the same day on which NAFTA was signed in 1994. The series of uprisings was carried out in the state of Chiapas by the Zapatista Army (EZLN), an organization of rebels who were outraged by recent neoliberal reforms, and specifically by the provisions of NAFTA that would eliminate the land protections associated with the *ejido* system. This movement, which involved attacks on government buildings and battles with the Mexican army, was a cornerstone of the Global Indigenous Movement and ultimately was victorious in achieving the goal of securing the indigenous peoples’ the land that had been promised them.

In Yucatán, however, in spite of similar grievances with these economic reforms, no comparable political resistance ever really formed during the Global Indigenous Movement (Gabbert, 2004; Mattiace, 2009). Though Yucatán is geographically quite close to Chiapas, where the Zapatista uprising took place, no regional or state-wide movement ever developed during this time. There are several reasons for this, one being that, following independence, the indigenous peasants in Yucatán were rather tightly controlled by the state’s network of henequen producers, which limited their ability to mobilize (Mattiace, 2009). However, that is not to say that Yucatán is entirely without its own history of ethnic conflict. Prior to independence, in the late 1800s the Yucatán peninsula’s agrarian workers revolted and initiated a conflict known as

the Caste War, which is considered to be one of the most militarily successful Indian rebellions in Latin American history. This revolt was predominantly inspired by discontent with the racial hierarchy, or caste system, imposed by the Spanish and by the Catholic church. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mayan peasants living in the region were provoked by a combination of factors, a few being the growth of agriculture and the poor labor conditions for workers, the increasing influence of the Catholic church, and a rise in taxes. The conflict that ensued, which lasted until 1904 and produced an enormous number of casualties, caused many Mayan peasants who were *not* involved in the conflict to flee westward into what is now the state of Yucatán.

The Caste War marked a crucial point in Mexican history, and was undeniably the largest indigenous-led rebellion in the Yucatán region. Despite this conflict, however, the elites' racialized power structure was by no means overthrown, and many Maya peasants continued to live under the oppressive system imposed by the Spanish and *criollos*. While no uprising as massive as the Caste War was ever again initiated, it is important to recognize that the Maya farmers living in the region and working on henequen farms continued to regularly challenge the *hacienda* system and rise up against those in power (Eiss, 2010). However, no comparable resistance movement has ever formed in the region again.

Another crucially important element of Mexico's contemporary political situation is the recent history of its largest political parties. Shortly after the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920, its two largest political parties, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), and the *Partido Accion Nacional* (PAN) were founded, in 1929 and 1939, respectively. PRI is a conservative party, and PAN is considered center-right, and they were both consistently supportive of Mexico's neoliberal reforms in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Overall, PRI is undeniably a more powerful party; considered the country's 'Revolutionary Party,' for decades the PRI was

closely associated with the formation of Mexico's constitution, and was in many ways intertwined with the structure of the government itself. For this reason, the PRI immediately assumed political power after the revolution, and was active in the development of the new political system. Towards the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, PRI became increasingly authoritative in nature, which allowed it to remain in power uninterrupted for 71 years, from its conception in 1929 until 2000. In the later decades of this one-party rule, the PRI became notorious for using extremely corrupt practices to stay in power, leading many Mexicans to sour on the party and seek alternative options. Today, people in Mexico still strongly associate the PRI with its history of corruption, and with its ties to the country's most powerful drug cartels. Indigenous peoples in Mexico especially associate the PRI with the human rights violations committed during its lengthy rule, many of which can be attributed to the War on Drugs.

In 2000, however, this 71-year one-party rule finally came to an end with the election of Vicente Fox of the PAN party. For many in Mexico, this election brought immense relief and hope that they had finally elected a leader who would hear from the people and bring substantive change. However, after 12 years of presidential rule under PAN with little political reform, in 2012 this sense of hope had dwindled and citizens had largely lost the sense of efficacy that they had regained in 2000. In 2012, a *priista* was once again elected to the presidency: Enrique Peña Nieto. For many, Peña Nieto, who has been proven to have close ties with Mexico's Sinaloa cartel, represented more of the same, seen as corrupt and representative of elite interests. Peña Nieto was inaugurated as president in late 2012, and ended his 6-year term in late 2018. Peña Nieto was still the acting president when I conducted my field research in Yucatán.

Although the PAN and PRI had alternated in the presidency until 2018, there are two other political parties that have posed legitimate challenges to this power structure. The first is

the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), a center-left party which was founded much later in 1989. The PRD has never been victorious in a presidential election, though it has had some success gaining seats in the national legislature, with some of its best election years in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The PRD has also had scattered electoral success in gubernatorial elections in states throughout the country. The PRD is particularly relevant to Mexican politics today because it is the party on which the now-president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, first ran. López Obrador, commonly referred to as ‘AMLO’, is the former mayor of Mexico City, but resigned from this position in 2005 to commit to his first presidential bid. He was then narrowly defeated by Felipe Calderón in an election that is still contested to this day, and has been a prominent national political figure ever since. AMLO then ran again under PRD in 2012, but then lost with a larger margin to PRI’s Enrique Peña Nieto. However, AMLO’s losing trajectory then changed in 2014 when he established his own leftist party, the *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional*, or MORENA.

The rise of AMLO is extremely important to indigenous politics in Mexico today. López Obrador is a charismatic left-wing populist who, in recent years, has gained massive support among Mexico’s poor and indigenous groups. His 2018 presidential campaign was marked by promises of grand change for Mexico’s *campesino* population and for all of those who had felt underserved by the previous administrations. Throughout his campaign he vowed to bring systemic change, fight corruption within the government, and reduce inequality and poverty. AMLO guaranteed certain new protections for indigenous-owned land, which resonated for obvious reasons among the country’s indigenous peoples. This campaign message overall captivated many of Mexico’s poor and indigenous peoples who felt that the country’s deeply institutional PRI and PAN did not represent them and/or could not help them. When I was in

Yucatán conducting field research, the power of AMLO and MORENA among the people was palpable, with many of the individuals who I interviewed expressing intense enthusiasm about the party and its potential. AMLO was ultimately elected with a majority of votes, which is extremely rare in a multi-party system. He was inaugurated on December 1, giving him until 2024 to demonstrate if he is truly capable of bringing the grandiose change promised throughout his campaign.

Since AMLO's rise as a national political figure, and since his election in 2018, many among Mexico's most underserved populations have been given a new sense of hope in Mexican politics. Although they themselves may not identify as indigenous, AMLO and other left-wing politicians have established platforms that identify with many of the interests of the country's indigenous peoples, providing a sense of substantive representation<sup>2</sup> that they may not find in candidates for PRI or PAN. In recent decades, politicians such as these have worked to enact positive changes for the country's indigenous peoples, many of which took place during the period of the Global Indigenous Movement. A great example of such changes would be the protections granted to indigenous peoples after the 1994 Zapatista rebellion, which secured certain cultural, political, and economic rights within designated areas. Another victory for the country's indigenous peoples was the establishment of the *usos y costumbres* system in 2001, shortly after the election of Vicente Fox (PAN), which essentially reserved certain parts of the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Sonora for self-governance by indigenous groups. Additionally, the federal government redesigned its electoral districts beginning in 2006 in a bid to provide

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<sup>2</sup> 'Substantive representation' refers to the idea that elected officials or representatives hold views or enact policies that align with the views and interests of their constituents. See further explanation in Appendix B.

greater representation to areas with high indigenous populations (Banducci, Donovan, and Karp, 2004; González Galván, 2008).

However, despite these positive changes associated with increased substantive representation, Mexico's indigenous peoples are still one of Mexico's most underrepresented groups in terms of *descriptive* representation.<sup>3</sup> Unlike many other countries in Latin America, Mexico does not have a quota system in place to ensure indigenous representation in its national governing bodies. For this reason, when compared with other Latin American countries, Mexico has one of the highest representation gaps in its elected bodies. In 2016, out of Mexico's national legislature—comprised of the 500-person Chamber of Deputies and the 128-person Senate—only 14 were indigenous, which translates to about 2%. According to a study by the Latin American Public Opinion Project, this indicates a representation gap of 81.33% (Hoffay & Rivas, 2016). And, while many countries throughout the world, including Ecuador, Colombia, and New Zealand, have established political parties based in indigenous identities, no such political parties have emerged on a national scale. Additionally, with the exception of Benito Juárez (1861-1872), Mexico has never had an indigenous president. Though the statistics on descriptive representation may be more hopeful in local politics in indigenous-majority states, on a national level the country's indigenous peoples have almost no direct say in political decisions.

In addition to having very little descriptive representation, Mexico's indigenous peoples continue to suffer from grossly disproportionate levels of poverty when compared to the rest of the population. According to government-reported statistics, 40.2% of indigenous peoples in Mexico are living in extreme poverty, compared to the national average of 10.4%. According to

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<sup>3</sup> 'Descriptive representation' refers to the idea that elected officials or representatives have the same descriptive characteristics (e.g. race, ethnic group, sex, occupation, place of birth) as their constituents. See further description in Appendix B.



the government's definition, to live in 'extreme poverty' is to lack the minimum income necessary to secure an adequate amount of food (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, 2018). The same report states that 40% of the country's municipalities have over 75% of their populations living in poverty; the majority of these municipalities are located in rural areas, and have large concentrations of indigenous citizens. These statistics are alarming, and indicate extreme levels of inequality between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples throughout Mexico.

As can be seen, the history of Mexico in many ways resembles that of other countries in Latin America that have been plagued by similar problems including party dominance, extreme inequality, and persisting colonial power structures. However, in order to begin to understand the politics of indigenous peoples in Yucatán it is imperative to have a basic knowledge of the country's history of indigenous movements and political parties, and the socioeconomic struggles that indigenous peoples continue to endure within Mexico.

## **2.2 Literature Review**

Although most scholars agree on the facts of the historical and current living conditions of indigenous peoples in Mexico and around the world, there is considerable dissonance in the academic literature regarding the *implications* of these histories on modern politics, and on the political involvement of indigenous peoples. On one hand, some scholars interpret Mexico's degree of socioeconomic and ethnic inequality to be indicative of poor democratic development and argue that, for diverse reasons, this should theoretically have the effect of depressing levels of political participation among members of lower socioeconomic status—supporting the argument for Hypothesis A. Others propose compelling arguments in favor of the influence that the Global Indigenous Movement has had, and the ability of oppressed groups to have a political voice and improve their conditions under the proper circumstances. These scholars in the latter

group support the power of the global process of activism, and assert that the types of political changes conceived during the Global Indigenous Movement should have had a positive effect on the political participation of indigenous peoples.

The scholars within the first group support the notion that the histories of oppression of indigenous peoples, and the modern-day manifestations of these same oppressive systems, are harmful for democracy and should be associated with lower levels of political engagement. Many political scientists agree that socioeconomic inequality in any form is harmful for democracy and hinders political participation among members of lower socioeconomic classes, which strongly implies that indigenous peoples—who disproportionately live near or under the poverty line in Latin America—should exhibit lower levels of political participation. These scholars argue that socioeconomic inequality hinders political equality and biases politics in favor of elite classes (Horowitz, 1993; Houle, 2015; Lijphart, 1997; Verba, 1967).

In their respective articles, Houle (2015) and Horowitz (1993) discuss the pitfalls of ethnic inequality, which arises when socioeconomic inequalities mirror ethnic divisions. Horowitz (1993) details the issues of inequality that can emerge naturally in societies that are ethnically diverse, and especially in populations that are particularly polarized along ethnic divisions. He argues that ethnic divisions inherently exacerbate inequality of political power and resource acquisition, hindering the political participation of ‘out groups,’ or ethnic groups that are not in power. His research emphasizes that these differences and inequalities are particularly visible in societies with a history of conflict between ethnic groups. Houle (2015) builds off of Horowitz’s (1993) theory, proposing that high levels of ethnic inequality are fundamentally damaging to democracy. He explains that ethnic inequality is particularly harmful when (1) inequality *within* each ethnic group is low, and (2) inequality *between* different ethnic groups is

high. This implies that if inequality were high overall, but not reflective of ethnic divisions, the negative effects on democracy would not be as strong. Together, Horowitz (1993) and Houle's (2015) arguments support Hypothesis A, suggesting that divisions and inequalities between ethnic groups can threaten political participation and the democratic process as a whole. However, worth noting is that both authors emphasize that this relationship is strongest when ethnicity is an especially salient political issue. Though their arguments certainly apply to some extent to most ethnically diverse populations, Horowitz (1993) and Houle (2015) affirm that ethnic divisions and inequalities are most harmful in societies that have histories of conflict and polarization between ethnic groups, which is not always the case for many countries with large indigenous populations—and not necessarily the case for many parts of Mexico.

A few scholars in this same group of thought have taken the research a step further to investigate exactly how conditions of inequality and ethnic divisions impact not just democracy, but political participation among affected groups. Lijphart (1997) and Verba (1967) discuss the correlation between poverty and political engagement, explaining that poverty and socioeconomic inequality has a negative effect on rates of political participation among members of lower classes. Verba (1967) also notes how this effect may be different for different *forms* of participation. He explains that, because it may be more difficult for members of a lower socioeconomic status to access the resources and information necessary to participate, participatory inequality is likely to be higher for political activities for which the costs are high (p. 72). Lijphart (1997) expands on this, suggesting that 'intensive' activities such as working on campaigns, contacting government officials, or donating to parties, are likely to exhibit higher levels of inequality that reflect socioeconomic differences (p. 1). Gallego's (2000) study echoes this notion, demonstrating that patterns of socioeconomic and participatory inequality do tend to

overlap, but that a poor economic situation may hinder some forms of positive political participation<sup>4</sup> (i.e. voting), while fostering participation in other forms. Lijphart (1997), Verba (1967), and Gallego (2000), all imply in their work that the relationship between inequality and participation is not necessarily a direct causal relationship. Rather, social and economic inequality restricts individuals' access to necessary resources, such as education, which would make them more likely to participate in politics. Gallego's (2000) study supports the conventional wisdom that education and employment status are among the largest determinants of electoral turnout, and that low socioeconomic status is highly correlated with both.

Altogether, these authors provide a fairly cohesive argument in support of Hypothesis A, suggesting that socioeconomic inequality between ethnic groups should hinder political participation—or, at least the 'intensive' forms of participation—for certain groups. Provided the existing statistics that demonstrate disproportionate levels of poverty among indigenous peoples around the world, the arguments by these authors offer considerable support for the notion that indigenous peoples should, in most cases, participate less in politics. Houle (2015) and Horowitz (1993) express some of the dangers of this, suggesting that significant political inequality between ethnic groups can aggravate existing ethnic divisions and threaten the success of the democratic process.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is considerable scholarly literature supporting the alternative hypothesis that, despite histories of oppression and marginalization, recent changes associated with democratization and the Global Indigenous Movement have made indigenous peoples *more* politically active. Although most scholars agree that the neoliberal political and

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<sup>4</sup> See definitions of 'positive' and 'negative' political participation on page 6.

economic reforms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century were overwhelmingly detrimental to the rights of indigenous peoples around the world, some have identified a few ways that these reforms were actually associated with higher indigenous political participation. While Yashar (1999) recognizes many of the crippling effects that neoliberalism has had on indigenous groups and communities, she argues that the political decentralization associated with these reforms provided new opportunities for indigenous peoples and groups to participate in politics. She claims that the transition of political power from central to local institutions provided individuals and interest groups with new opportunities to influence local and national politics, ultimately leading to an increase in indigenous political participation. Rice (2012) supports a similar argument, claiming that, although neoliberal reforms certainly undermined indigenous political participation in many ways, it provided new opportunities for other forms of participation. She specifically argues that, while neoliberalism exacerbated socioeconomic exclusion and largely incapacitated labor or class-based collective action, it was also associated with an increase in democratic rights, providing the ideal landscape for the emergence of new social and protest movements. Though neither Yashar (1999) nor Rice (2012) argue that neoliberalism was overall beneficial for indigenous peoples, they do identify ways that the reforms of this period did provide new opportunities for other forms of political engagement.

Aside from the new opportunities provided by neoliberal reforms, many scholars argue that the positive political changes enacted during the Global Indigenous Movement—which was, in part, a *response* to neoliberalism—should have had the effect of increasing political participation among indigenous peoples. One of the most palpable changes associated with the Global Indigenous Movement is the increase in both the descriptive and substantive<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix B for further explanation of ‘descriptive’ and ‘substantive’ representation.

representation of indigenous peoples in the political sphere of the affected countries. During this time there was a notable increase in the substantive representation of indigenous peoples, meaning that indigenous interests and rights rose to prominence on the political agendas of various countries. Many countries simultaneously witnessed an increase in descriptive representation, or in the number of individuals with indigenous ethnic backgrounds being elected to political office. In some cases, such as Bolivia, Colombia, and New Zealand, the government established quota systems to require that a minimum number of elected seats go to indigenous politicians—though the effects of these quotas were marginal, as they still only require a very small number. Overall, the increases in representation throughout the world during the Global Indigenous Movement were staggered, with not all countries observing significant improvements. However, scholars nonetheless argue that these improvements in representation should have had a notable effect on the political participation of indigenous peoples.

Banducci et al. (2004) offer empirical support for this idea that the descriptive representation of minority groups improves political participation among those groups, a theory known as the Minority Empowerment Thesis. This study, which uses data from the U.S. and New Zealand<sup>6</sup>, proves that the representation of minority groups in politics strengthens those minorities' relationships with the government, improves voter efficacy, and fosters political participation. Raul Madrid and Matthew Rhodes-Purdy (2016) provide further support for the positive impacts of descriptive representation, proving that indigenous leadership in Bolivia has had a significant impact on the extent to which indigenous peoples support their government. These arguments, however, may not be very significant for the case of Mexico, where

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<sup>6</sup> Banducci et al.'s (1999) study used data from New Zealand and the U.S. to conduct a comparative analysis of the effects of descriptive representation on political participation of minorities. In New Zealand, the minority group that they were specifically investigating was the Maori, New Zealand's most prominent indigenous group. In the United States, however, they were not looking at indigenous groups but at African-Americans.

descriptive representation for indigenous peoples remains low even after the Global Indigenous Movement. Madrid and Rhodes-Purdy (2016) also predict that regime support would be positively correlated with political participation, a notion with considerable theoretical and empirical support among the existing literature (Almond and Verba, 1963; Crow, 2010). Together, Banducci et al. (2004) and Madrid and Rhodes-Purdy (2016) provide credible evidence for the Minority Empowerment Thesis, and therefore for the positive impacts that increased representation should have on the political participation of indigenous peoples. These theories build off of those of Yashar (1999) and Rice (2012) to form the overall observation that the political changes associated with neoliberalism and with the Global Indigenous Movement have had positive impacts on the political participation of indigenous peoples around the world.

Another scholar, Benjamin Reilly (2000), directly opposes the viewpoint described earlier of Horowitz (1993), who outlines the ways in which ethnic divisions and diversity can create problems for democracy and participation. Reilly (2000) proposes the opposite, claiming that the presence of many ethnic groups can actually have *positive* consequences for democratic participation, and for the viability of democracy as a whole. He uses the case of Papua New Guinea as an example, demonstrating that ethnic diversity and fragmentation can actually benefit the democratic process. This argument, then, directly conflicts with some of those within the first group of scholars, and raises the question of which hypothesis may be true in the case of Yucatán. If Reilly's (2000) argument is viable, then this would suggest that the ethnic diversity of Yucatán may actually have a positive effect on political participation.

Considering the variety of theories concerning minorities and how they engage with politics under different circumstances, it appears that there is a bit of a divide in the literature regarding what the situation would be for indigenous peoples, who have experienced severe

political and socioeconomic oppression, yet have also risen up and taken advantage of opportunities to engage in politics and expand their political rights. The first group of scholars, which includes Houle (2015), Horowitz (1993), Lijphart (1997), Verba (1967), and Gallego (2000), proposes various theories to explain why ethnic divisions and systemic socioeconomic oppression should drive indigenous peoples to be less engaged with national and electoral politics. These authors collectively argue that ethnic divisions and socioeconomic inequality between different groups should theoretically hinder democratic activity and depress political participation among disadvantaged groups. This group of scholars, when viewed in conjunction with the available data on levels of inequality between ethnic groups in Mexico, provide a coherent argument in support for Hypothesis A, which predicts that indigenous peoples will exhibit lower levels of participation in Yucatán.

The second group, which includes Yashar (1999), Rice (2012), Banducci et al. (2004), Madrid and Rhodes-Purdy (2016), and Reilly (2000), formulates various opposing arguments as to why, in spite of indigenous peoples' histories of oppression, they should participate at a high level in politics. Yashar (1999) and Rice (2012) argue that, while neoliberalism undeniably hindered the political participation of oppressed groups in many ways, these same changes also provided new avenues for participation that hadn't existed before. Banducci et al. (2004) and Madrid and Rhodes-Purdy (2016) propose that the political changes associated with the Global Indigenous Movement—one of the most significant being the increase of descriptive representation of indigenous peoples—should have had a positive effect on rates of indigenous political efficacy and participation. Reilly's (2000) argument implies that ethnic diversity, certainly a characteristic of Mexico and the Yucatán, can have a positive effect on democracy and political participation. Altogether, these scholars therefore present an opposition to the first



group, and considerable support for Hypothesis B, which predicts equal participation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

On the first side, the authors defend the power of the processes of oppression, claiming that these histories of poverty, marginalization and ethnic subordination experienced by indigenous peoples should hinder their political activity today. On the other side, authors provide various arguments in favor of the influence of the process of activism, proposing that indigenous peoples have taken advantage of new opportunities created by the reforms associated with neoliberalism, democratization, and the Global Indigenous Movement to be more active in their political systems. In light of these two plausible but opposing theoretical perspectives, we are left with the nagging question of which is true. What *is* the current state of indigenous political participation, and how does it relate to their historical experiences under the global processes of oppression and activism? In reality, it is very possible that many of the proposed arguments are true to an extent, and that the answer varies greatly depending on the specific case. Even in the isolated case of Yucatán in Mexico, however, it is difficult to discern which process—oppression or activism—has prevailed, and how.

As we consider these different viewpoints and arguments, it is helpful to take a moment to consider how they work together to convey common ideas. Specifically, when discussing the relationship between indigenous peoples' histories and the current state of political participation, it is necessary to distinguish between different types of participation, and different types of change that they may activate. In the introduction, I created and labeled two categories of political participation: positive and negative.<sup>7</sup> I define 'positive' political participation as

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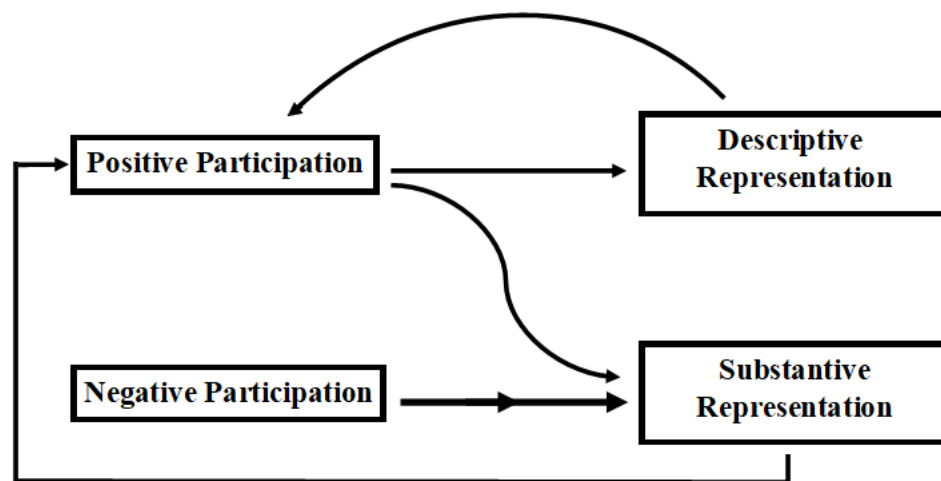
<sup>7</sup> For a more thorough explanation of this categorization, see Appendix B.

participation in any political activity that involves negotiating with or operating *through* a government structure with the intent to enact change. Examples of this would be voting or running for office, as both necessitate working with the existing political institutions to achieve a political end. ‘Negative’ political participation, on the other hand, refers to more assertive forms of political participation that circumvent the institutional structure of a country to try to address a grievance more urgently. This generally refers to direct action, or activities such as protesting or rioting, both of which were prominent during the Global Indigenous Movement.

Much of the literature indicates that factors such as socioeconomic inequality, education, and negative attitudes towards the government are typically associated with lower levels of what I call positive participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Banducci et al., 2004; Lijphart, 1997; Verba, 1967). However, it appears that political satisfaction has a different effect on *negative* participation. Many scholars argue that, while political oppression and discontent may depress positive political participation, it can often have the effect of provoking negative forms of participation such as collective protests, riots, or revolts (Muller & Seligson, 1987). This connection is the basis for the established belief that discontent with the neoliberal reforms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century were the driving force behind indigenous mobilization and direct action, or ‘negative’ participation, during the Global Indigenous Movement (Rice, 2012; Yashar, 1999).

The existing literature also suggests that these different forms of participation have unique relationships with different types of political representation. As discussed in the previous section, the Global Indigenous Movement was associated with different changes in both descriptive and substantive representation, though the extent to which each was improved varies greatly by country and region. The literature and the history of the Global Indigenous Movement has indicated that the different forms of participation—positive and negative—have had different

relationships with substantive versus descriptive representation. Graphic A on the following page illustrates some of these connections. Positive participation, though a generally slower process, is the most conventional and direct route to improving both descriptive and substantive representation; by working through or within the institutional framework to further a political agenda, citizens can take an active role in improving their own substantive representation and getting their interests out into the political sphere. Additionally, positive forms of political participation such as voting, campaigning, or creating a new political party, are one way that groups can improve their descriptive representation in the government. For example, by creating and voting for an indigenous political party, indigenous peoples can improve their own descriptive representation.



**Figure A: Representation and Participation**

And, as Madrid and Rhodes-Purdy (2016) and Banducci et al. (2004) argue, this flows in both directions, as improvements in descriptive representation can in turn generate support for the political system, and prompt previously underrepresented groups to be more active politically. Similarly, increases in substantive representation can encourage positive

participation, though this process is likely more gradual. For example, if a government enacts certain reforms that are popular with indigenous groups, such as new land protections, this would increase indigenous peoples' substantive representation in the government. This may then improve support and satisfaction, and drive indigenous citizens to work with the government through positive participation to enact change. Some scholars would argue that this increase in substantive representation, and subsequent increase in positive political participation, was one effect of the Global Indigenous Movement. Such could be argued in the case of Mexico, where descriptive representation for indigenous peoples has not necessarily increased, but substantive representation has.

Negative forms of political participation, on the other hand, are by nature a more direct route to influencing politics. These activities, which include rioting, protesting, or using violent means, by definition take place outside of the formal institutional framework of the polity, and can be very effective in gaining the attention of policymakers and bringing about change. A famous and historic example of successful negative participation in the context of the Global Indigenous Movement would be the 'Water War' in Cochabamba, Bolivia, which took place between 1999 and 2000. Because negative political activities are generally more assertive in nature, the arrow between 'negative participation' and 'substantive' representation is bolded in the graphic. Also, though this is not shown in Graphic A, a *lack* of substantive representation can be an important driving factor of negative political participation. In order to understand the histories of oppression and activism, the Global Indigenous Movement, and current trends of indigenous political participation, it is necessary to recognize these different forms of participation, and the ways that they are related to different types of political change.

The arguments of the two groups of scholars that I have composed present a clear dissonance, with conflicting predictions regarding how oppression and activism have affected indigenous political participation. Unfortunately, there is no definitive answer to the question of which set of theories is most precise, or which historical process has prevailed, to produce the current state of indigenous political participation around the world. Much like the literature regarding normative theories of how indigenous peoples *should* participate, the descriptive observations of how indigenous peoples *do* interact with politics are incomplete and inconsistent. Some scholars report vast improvements in levels of indigenous political participation during and after the Global Indigenous Movement, bolstering hope that indigenous peoples may have succeeded in overcoming oppression and/or marginalization inherent in their political systems. Although all acknowledge that each country and region has its own specific circumstances that must be taken into account, many authors have made broad claims reporting increases in the political engagement and participation of indigenous peoples (Singh, 2018; Yashar, 1999). Others do not make such broad generalizations, but do report substantial increases in political participation in specific cases; Rasch (2012) and Madrid and Rhodes-Purdy (2016) report increases in Guatemala and Bolivia, respectively, that were associated with the political changes of the Global Indigenous Movement. For the specific case of Mexico, Sochet (2007) claims that the country saw a significant increase in voting participation by indigenous peoples between 1988 and 2000—precisely when the Global Indigenous Movement was at its peak, and when Mexico was moving towards more fair and democratic elections after decades of one-party rule. Again, the observations made by this group of scholars lend support to Hypothesis B, or the notion that indigenous peoples *do* participate in politics.

Other scholars, however, report the exact opposite trend and claim that positive political participation among indigenous peoples has *not* increased substantially; instead, they consider that it is still alarmingly low and must be addressed. One such observation was expressed in a 2013 report published by the United Nations Development Programme, which reveals that political inclusion and participation by indigenous peoples, and especially indigenous women, remains critically low throughout Latin America. Though it does recognize some of the positive advancements associated with the Global Indigenous Movement, the report generally argues that indigenous peoples have not benefited from regional economic improvements and are still limited by factors such as poverty and socioeconomic inequality. Several other authors have echoed similar observations, claiming that, though the Global Indigenous Movement incited improvements in indigenous rights and representation, these changes have been insufficient and political participation remains low (Ignacio Martinez, 2011). One scholar makes a similar observation for the specific case of Mexico, arguing that new political changes such as redistricting and marginal increases in descriptive representation have not improved indigenous political participation, and that Mexico's *indígenas* still feel largely excluded from the political process (González Galván, 2008). The observations made by this group of scholars, then, lend support to Hypothesis A, or the idea that indigenous participation is still low.

As it appears, therefore, the observations of the current state of indigenous political participation, like the theoretical literature on the topic, are quite inconsistent and tend to raise more questions than they answer. Some scholars argue that continued oppression and ethnic divisions should depress indigenous political participation (Hypothesis A), and some observations, such as the 2013 UN report, report exactly this trend. Other scholars, however, imply that indigenous peoples have taken advantage of the positive changes of neoliberalism and

the indigenous activist movements to become more politically engaged (Hypothesis B)—and some observations suggest that this has been exactly the case. Some variation between cases certainly makes sense, since each country, and each part of each country, may have been affected to a different extent by the processes of oppression and activism. However, the direct contradictions between every element of these arguments beg the question of why the literature is so inconsistent that even the observations of current trends—something that one would expect to be relatively objective—are drastically inconsistent.

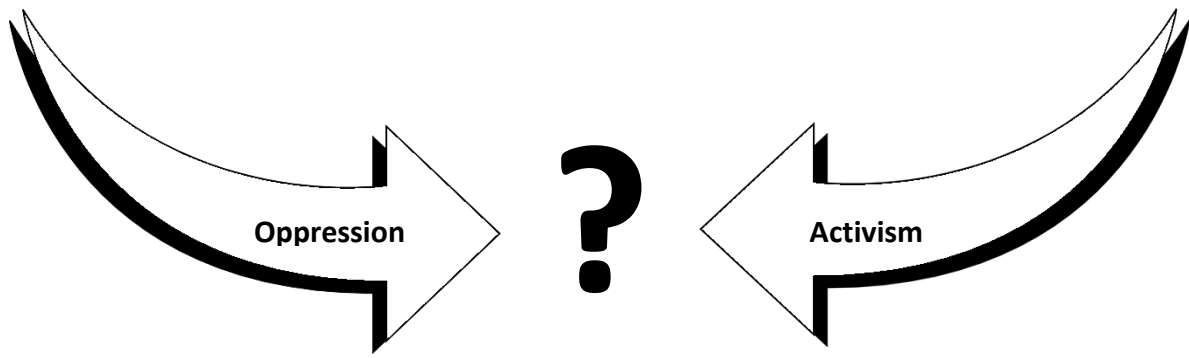
The discrepancies in the existing literature are exactly what compelled me to work to uncover what the current state of indigenous political participation is in the state of Yucatán, and what roles the global processes of oppression and activism have played in shaping the current trends. Although the Yucatán is only a single state in a single country, and will certainly not be representative of every case around the world, investigating these questions on a small scale can contribute to a greater wisdom regarding how these global processes have interacted with individuals, and to what the situation may be in similar cases. Research of this nature, even on a small scale, contributes to an understanding of how political history and contemporary political changes affect the current state of politics. This study could provide some much-needed clarity to the otherwise inconclusive literature regarding the Global Indigenous Movement and its relationship to trends in political participation today. I chose to conduct this research in the state of Yucatán, located on the Yucatán peninsula in the southeast of Mexico, because, as detailed in the previous section, it has a considerably large indigenous population and a unique political history that includes both global processes of oppression and activism. Mexico in general is an ideal location for such a study, since it is one of the world's largest democracies. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the extent to which its massive indigenous population participates in the

political system. This is especially true for states such as Yucatán, where half of the population identifies as indigenous and/or speaks an indigenous language.

I find my research question for my project in Yucatán at the intersection between the two conflicting narratives identified: the first narrative is of oppression, and the various reasons why this should cause low indigenous participation. The second narrative is of activism and the Global Indigenous Movement, and the theoretical reasons for why this should have caused increased indigenous political participation. I seek to find where these two processes intersect in the case of Yucatán to form trends of political participation among indigenous peoples. The primary question that I hope to analyze is: To what extent do indigenous peoples in Yucatán participate in their political system, and how does this differ (if at all) from participation rates among non-indigenous peoples? This question aims to uncover the extent to which indigenous peoples participate in certain political activities, and if this presents any differences with political behavior among non-indigenous peoples.

The next question that I seek to answer, designed to supplement the first, is: What is the general attitude towards the government among respondents in Yucatán? And, is there any difference in political opinion between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents? I consider this second question supplementary in that it is meant to provide background information to potentially explain any trends found in the first. For example, if the first question finds that indigenous respondents *do* participate at a higher or lower rate than non-indigenous respondents, the second question concerning political sentiment can discern if this is connected to a more positive or negative opinion of the government. This second question can also convey some information about the extent to which the recent changes associated with the Global Indigenous Movement have improved a sense of substantive representation among indigenous respondents.





**Figure 2: Oppression and Activism**

This two-part question, and the inconclusive nature of the existing literature on the subject, is what led me to formulate my two opposing hypotheses, and test the case of Yucatán to see what the result would be there. Some theorists argue that the historical process of *oppression* should supersede that of activism, leading to lower rates of political participation among indigenous peoples than non-indigenous peoples. This hypothesis, which I personally found to be the most persuasive, is based in the deep history of oppression of indigenous peoples since the colonial era, evidence of extremely high levels of ethnic inequality throughout Mexico, and persisting low levels of descriptive representation. These socioeconomic and historical factors may have had the effect of depressing political participation among indigenous respondents, and similarly may result in more negative political attitudes among indigenous respondents. Thus, my initial expectation, Hypothesis A, is as follows:

*Hypothesis A: In spite of positive democratic advancements in Mexico in recent decades, and despite positive changes associated with the activism of the Global Indigenous Movement, indigenous peoples in Yucatán are still (1) less satisfied with the government and (2) participate in politics at lower rates than their non-indigenous or mestizo counterparts.*

In the event that this hypothesis does not accurately depict the state of political relations in Yucatán—as my results will show that it does not—I present an alternative hypothesis that favors the influence of the historical process of activism. This hypothesis predicts that

indigenous peoples in Yucatán will *not* participate at lower rates than non-indigenous peoples, due to the successes of the Global Indigenous Movement in Mexico, and the increasing equality of opportunity associated with democratization. This hypothesis, Hypothesis B, is as follows:

*Hypothesis B: In spite of persisting inequalities in Mexico and a lack of descriptive representation, indigenous peoples will exhibit (1) similar attitudes and levels of satisfaction with the government, and (2) statistically equivalent levels of political participation when compared with their non-indigenous counterparts.*

### 3.0 Methods, Data, and Results

To explore the relationship between indigeneity and political participation in the state of Yucatán, I used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. I conducted this field research over a span of six weeks, collecting a total of 114 anonymous surveys and interviewing seven individuals in more depth. The surveys and interviews were conducted between 3 main locations in the state of Yucatán, two of which are among the state's most prominent urban centers, and the third of which is a small village located outside of a major urban center. This village is one of the state's hundreds of *comisarias*, or small localities within city districts that have some form of local governance. These *comisarias* are governed by elected leaders, known as *comisarios*. Around half of the 114 surveys were conducted in university classrooms, with the other half conducted randomly in public locations such as parks or central plazas.

The fact that so many of the surveys were done in a university setting presents a few limitations: first, this means that the data disproportionately represents a middle to higher socioeconomic class, which is not necessarily representative of the full population of the state. Therefore, these responses may be more indicative of the perspectives of individuals of a more affluent background who have the resources to obtain a university education. However, I attempted to reduce the extent to which this affected my results by conducting the rest of the surveys in public settings, or in smaller rural communities. Also, because many of the surveys were conducted in a university setting, many of the respondents were of a university age (18 to 24). However, the remaining surveys that were conducted in other settings provide the study with a sufficient number of respondents from other age groups as well. Additionally, I later compared some of my findings with similar findings from nationwide data collected by the Latin American

Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) to support the validity of my results in spite of these limitations.

The vast majority of surveys were conducted in Spanish and in a written format. However, this method had to be adapted when surveying in the *comisaria*, in which many residents are only fluent in the Yucatec Maya language and do not understand Spanish. For this task, I enlisted the help of a native Maya-speaking colleague, who translated the survey questions from Spanish into Yucatec Maya and the responses back into Spanish to be recorded. The survey that I created for this study was comprised, with a total of 26 questions. It generally took about ten minutes to complete the survey in written format, and between 15 and 20 minutes when done orally and with Maya-to-Spanish translation. The survey began with demographic questions which asked for information regarding the respondent's age group, gender, ethnic self-identification, and linguistic background. The survey then asked about the respondent's political behavior and voting history, meant to measure the extent to which he/she engages in specific political activities. The next few questions were focused on political sentiment, designed to gauge opinions of the government and to compare satisfaction with the local versus federal levels of government. The survey then concluded with a brief description of a specific recent government initiative meant to provide services to indigenous communities, followed by a question of the extent to which the respondent supports such an initiative.<sup>8</sup>

Altogether, the survey questions were designed to evoke information regarding political sentiment and activity in the state of Yucatán. The surveys provided the data necessary to analyze variations in trends of political participation and attitudes between indigenous and non-

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<sup>8</sup> Survey included in Appendix A.

indigenous members of the population. The interviews would then serve to provide information to supplement the results from the surveys and to offer potential explanations for the newfound trends in sentiment and participation. Through this research method, I sought to find evidence for one of my hypotheses. Though I initially expected that Hypothesis A would be most accurate and that indigenous peoples in Yucatán would exhibit lower levels of political participation and more negative political sentiment, my data ultimately shows statistically equivalent, or in some cases higher political participation and sentiment among indigenous respondents. Therefore, the results from my study lend more support to Hypothesis B. While these data provide an insight into trends in participation and political attitudes, they also raise several new questions and provide some room for speculation, which I will discuss in greater depth in Chapter 4.

### **3.1 Independent Variable: Native Language**

For the purpose of this study, I established indigeneity as my independent variable. Quantifying indigeneity is a rather complicated task, and the method of doing so is a subject of debate for many scholars. Those who have conducted similar research on indigenous peoples generally choose to quantify indigenous identity through one of two methods: either self-identification, or using markers of indigenous background such as maternal language. Self-identification refers to the process of allowing each respondent to choose the ethnic identity with which he/she most identifies. This option is supported by some scholars who argue that there is a lack of consensus around how to define indigeneity, and that self-identification provides respondents with the freedom to choose their own labels (Singh, 2018). However, using self-identification to quantify ethnicity in an empirical study can become problematic because it is so subjective, and an individual's self-identification can change from one situation to the next. Studies have shown that indigenous self-identification changes depending on political context;

for example, during the Global Indigenous Movement (1980s-2000s), self-identification with indigenous groups increased substantially (Fontana, 2014). Additionally, it is evident that the understandings of complex terms such as *indígena* or *mestizaje* vary greatly in many parts of Mexico (Mattiace, 2009), further complicating the prospect of a universal understanding of indigenous identity. This would be especially true in the case of Yucatán, where ethnicity is considered to be a very fluid concept (Armstrong-Fumero, 2013; Gabbert, 2004; Mattiace, 2009).

The second method popularly used to quantify indigeneity is associating respondents with certain indicators of indigenous identity, such as growing up with an indigenous language or in a predominantly indigenous town. These types of identifiers generally tend to be more consistent across regions and over time, since they are not subjective in the same way as self-identification. However, this method fails to acknowledge the importance of *feeling* a personal association with an indigenous group or background, which is undeniably a significant part of what it means to be indigenous. However, given the diversity of understandings and definitions of terms such as *maya*, *indígena*, or *mestizo* throughout Mexico and specifically in the state of Yucatán (Mattiace, 2009; Armstrong-Fumero, 2013), I find it most appropriate for my study to use one of these identifiers—specifically, native language—to indicate indigenous identity. Native language, also referred to as maternal language or natural language, refers to the first language that an individual learns, or the language with which an individual was raised. Indigenous peoples in Latin America are often raised speaking the indigenous languages of their families or communities, and then learn Spanish (or Portuguese) as a second language to use in formal or professional settings. In some cases, these individuals only really interact with other indigenous peoples in their communities, and never actually become fluent in a second language. This is especially true for individuals who reside outside of major urban areas.

Therefore, many people who have an indigenous ethnic background will mark an indigenous language (in the case of the Yucatán, Yucatec Maya) as their native language, even if they are also fluent in Spanish. For this reason, although native language only comprises a small part of what it means to be indigenous, it acts as an effective indicator of indigeneity for the purpose of empirical study. In my survey, I provide sections for self-identification *and* for respondents to indicate their native language; however, for the purpose of my analysis, I will be using native language as the marker for indigeneity. Ultimately, 44.55% of respondents claimed Spanish to be their native language, with 51.82% claiming Yucatec Maya; only 3.64% of respondents claimed the other options, Nahuatl and Mixtec (indigenous languages more common in central Mexico), as their native languages. To facilitate the analysis of trends among members of these different groups, I created a new variable to simply categorize these respondents as either indigenous or non-indigenous based on their native language. This new variable, *natlang*, designates respondents as either indigenous (55.45%) or non-indigenous (44.55%).<sup>9</sup>

Worth noting is that the ‘non-indigenous’ category of respondents includes everyone that participated in the survey who selected Spanish, and not an indigenous language, as their native language. This category includes members of various ethnic groups, including White/Caucasian, Mestizo/a, Afro-Mexican, and Mulatto. Though there may be variation in the political sentiment and participation among the different groups within this ‘non-indigenous’ group, I have grouped them all together for the purpose of this survey. Therefore, when I refer to ‘non-indigenous

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<sup>9</sup> To compare with the results from self-identified ethnic identity (*ethid*), 57.41% of respondents identified as indigenous, and 41.67% identified with one of the non-indigenous categories (White/Caucasian, Mulatto, Afro-Mexican, or Mestizo). The percentage of respondents who self-identify as indigenous is therefore slightly higher than the percentage of respondents who grew up with an indigenous native language. This is interesting, and indicates that some people who grew up with Spanish as their native language still identify as indigenous.

respondents' throughout this paper, I am referring to all who selected Spanish as their native language, regardless of self-identified ethnic background.

### **3.2 Dependent Variable I: Political Participation**

Because my research question has two parts, there are a few dependent variables that I will be analyzing. All of the data from my surveys will be grouped into one of two categories: political participation and political sentiment. The first measurement of political participation is electoral turnout, which I analyze from the 2012 and 2018 presidential elections. This variable is measured by respondents' selections of whether they voted in 2012 (*vote12*), and whether they were planning to vote in the upcoming elections (*vote18*). For both of these variables, I chose to drop all responses from members of the youngest age group (18-24). I did this because, in 2018 when these surveys were conducted, a vast majority of respondents ages 18 to 24 would not have been able to vote legally in 2012, as the voting age in Mexico is 18. Because of this, a huge majority of those aged 18-24 (80.88%) reported not voting in 2012.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, I omitted the 18-24 age group from my analysis of voter turnout for 2012 and 2018. For all other variables, however, I include responses from all age groups.

The second variable meant to gauge political participation is *polact*, through which I measure the percentage of respondents who claim to have done the following political activities in the past year: attend protests, present a petition, volunteer for a political campaign, participate in interest groups or unions, and/or run for political office. The final variable within the category of political participation is *polinf*, which measures the respondents' self-identified level of

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<sup>10</sup> This number indicates that 19.22% of these respondents aged 18-24 reported voting in 2012. I assume that the respondents that made this selection either (A) were aged 24 at the time of the survey, which would have made them 18 during the 2012 elections, or (B) were dishonest in their survey responses.



political informedness on a scale. Political informedness is one way of measuring political efficacy, and is considered crucially important for understanding political participation (Almond and Verba, 1963; Milner, 2002). Generally, political informedness is used as a predictor of participation levels, with the politically uninformed generally presumed to be significantly less likely to participate in political activities.

### **3.3 Dependent Variable II: Political Sentiment**

The remainder of the questions on the survey intend to address the second dependent variable of the political sentiment and attitudes of respondents. The first method of quantifying political sentiment is through feeling thermometers of elected public officials. These feeling thermometers require respondents to measure how they feel about specific officials in terms of degrees, or ‘temperatures,’ on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very negative, 5 being neutral, and 10 being very positive. I offered feeling thermometers for then-President Enrique Peña Nieto (*therm\_p*), and for the mayor (*therm\_alc*), which would be different for every municipality.

The next few questions intended to quantify respondents’ opinions regarding how the government invests its money. The first question, marked by the variable *pesos*, asks, “If you had \$100 pesos to invest in the government, how would you spend it?”, followed by eight options: the economy/jobs, anti-corruption, the environment, education, human rights, anti-drug initiatives, expanding the military, or other. The next question poses a comparison to the first, asking, “How do you think the government spends the majority of its money?” followed by the same options (*govgast*). Next, the survey asks, “If you could choose one thing on which the government should focus MORE, what would it be?” again with the same eight options (*govmas*). The fourth question poses: “If you could choose one thing on which the government should focus LESS, what would it be?” (*govmen*). These questions were designed to compare

what respondents want from the government with what results they *see* from the government in terms of public investment. This should exhibit the extent to which respondents feel that their political interests are actually represented by the government. With these questions, I generally assumed that the data from these questions would demonstrate a discrepancy between what respondents want the government to invest in, and what they believe the government spends its money on. I expected that this discrepancy would be greater among indigenous respondents, which was based in the presumption that the government is not as responsive to the interests of indigenous citizens.

The next eight questions are formatted as follows: the survey proposes a statement regarding the government and requires the respondent to select a degree of agreement with each statement. For each question, 1 indicates “I strongly agree”, 2 is “I somewhat agree”, 3 is “I neither agree nor disagree”, 4 is “I somewhat disagree”, and 5 “I strongly disagree.” All of these statements are positive opinions of the government, related to topics such as government effectiveness, substantive representation, and government intentions. Because all of these statements are positive, for all of them, a higher average score signifies a more negative opinion, and a lower average score signifies a more positive attitude on that subject. Many of these questions are arranged so that they pose a statement regarding the federal government, then pose the exact same statement in relation to the local government. The questions were designed in this format to form a direct comparison between attitudes towards the federal and local government, and to see if there is any difference in opinions regarding the separate levels of government. When designing these questions, I expected that respondents would exhibit more positive attitudes towards the local government. This expectation was based in the observed tendency for

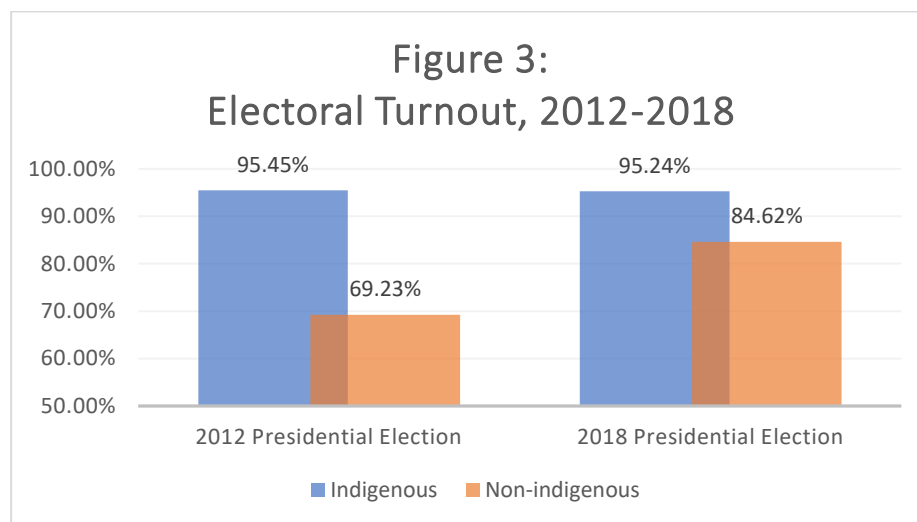
citizens to favor local politicians over federal institutions, and in the fact that then-President Enrique Peña Nieto had particularly low public approval during his last months in office.

The final question on the survey is meant to gauge the extent to which respondents approve of government programs designed to benefit poor Maya communities and *comisarias*. The question details a specific 2018 initiative by the National Commission for the Development of the Indigenous Towns (CDI) which aimed to provide infrastructure, public services, potable water, electricity, and communication services to residents of these poor communities. It then asks the respondent to identify the extent to which he/she supports the described initiative (*cdi\_init*). I initially expected that indigenous respondents would be more likely to favor such an initiative, since they may be more directly affected by the policy.

### **3.4 Results: Political Participation**

According to the survey responses, voter turnout in the state of Yucatán was very high in 2012, with 86.11% of respondents reporting to have voted in the presidential elections. Interestingly, this number is significantly higher than the national average for presidential electoral turnout for 2012, which was only 63.08% (Instituto Nacional Electoral). The average turnout in Yucatán for the 2012 election year was slightly higher at 70.17%, but still not nearly as high as what was reported in my survey. It is unclear why there is such a significant discrepancy in reported turnout between the data from my surveys and that national average. One potential reason is that respondents may have been dishonest about their voting history due to ‘favorability bias,’ or the idea that they choose the answer that they think the surveyor wants to hear. Overall, my results indicate that turnout among indigenous respondents was *much* higher than that among non-indigenous respondents in 2012. Non-indigenous respondents were much closer to the national average at 69.23%, while an extraordinary 95.45% of indigenous

respondents claimed to have voted in the 2012 elections. In the 2018 elections, my average voter turnout was even higher at 91.67%—again, much higher than the national average, which in 2018 was 63.42% (INE). Again with this election, indigenous respondents appeared to turn out much more at 95.24% than non-indigenous respondents, who turned out at a rate of 84.62%. The results for 2012 and 2018 can be seen in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3: Electoral Turnout, 2012-2018**

To ensure the validity of my results, I consulted a larger dataset from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) to examine responses to questions similar to those included in my survey. Using a 2014 dataset, which represents the entire country, I first analyzed reported voter turnout from the 2012 presidential election. Overall, the reported turnout in the LAPOP data was lower than that from my own surveys, but still significantly higher than government-reported turnout (63.08%) at 74.92%. Importantly, these data too showed significantly higher reported turnout among indigenous<sup>11</sup> respondents: 87.50% of indigenous respondents reported

<sup>11</sup> As with my own survey data, I separated respondents into ‘indigenous’ or ‘non-indigenous’ groups based on their native/maternal language for purposes of consistency.

voting in 2012, compared to 74.45% of non-indigenous respondents. This remarkably high reported turnout supports my data, and shows that reported turnout *is* often higher than actual turnout. Additionally, these data confirm my finding that indigenous peoples turn out (or report turning out) at a higher rate than non-indigenous peoples.

For the second variable associated with political participation, *polact*, the surveys displayed slightly higher participation in most political activities among indigenous respondents; however, due to the small sample size, none of these differences are statistically significant, meaning that indigenous and non-indigenous respondents reported to participate at statistically equivalent levels. This variable measures the number of times the respondent had participated in the following activity during the year before taking the survey: attending a protest, presenting a petition, volunteering for a political campaign, participating in an interest group, or running for political office. Among these activities, the most popular was volunteering for a political party or campaign; an average of 15.79% of respondents had been a political volunteer in the previous year. Indigenous respondents reported volunteering at a slightly higher rate of 16.39%, and non-indigenous respondents slightly lower at 14.29%. The high volume of respondents participating in voluntary political activity makes sense, since this survey was conducted just before a series of major elections. The second most popular activity overall was participating in protests, with an average of 6.14% of respondents selecting this option. Again, this number was higher for indigenous respondents at 8.20%, and lower for non-indigenous respondents at 4.08%.

The least common political activities were petitioning, participating in an interest group, or running for political office. Only 4.39% of respondents had petitioned in the previous year, with a fairly consistent participation rate among indigenous and non-indigenous respondents. On average, interest group participation had the same rate as petitioning at 4.39%. This number was

lower for indigenous respondents at 3.28%, while 6.12% of non-indigenous respondents claimed to have participated in the previous year. Finally, running for political office was the least common political activity for respondents overall, with 2.63% claiming to have done so in the year prior. The survey question did not require respondents to clarify what type of political office they had run for; therefore, this 2.63% could have been referring to experiences running for a formal political office, or for a local-level community council or *comisario* position, or even for a leading position in an interest group. Regardless, however, this 2.63% is a fairly high number. The percentage of indigenous respondents who had run for office was slightly higher than the average at 3.28%, while for non-indigenous respondents it was slightly less common at 2.04%. The trends for each political activity can be seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: ‘Which of the following political activities have you participated in during the last year?’**

| <b>‘Which of the following political activities have you participated in during the past year?’</b><br><i>n=86</i> |                          |                              |                          |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
|  | <b><u>Indigenous</u></b> | <b><u>Non-Indigenous</u></b> | <b><u>Difference</u></b> |
| <b>Petition</b>  | 4.92%                    | 4.02%                        | -0.9%                    |
| <b>Volunteer</b>   | 16.39%                   | 14.29%                       | -2.1%                    |
| <b>Interest Group</b>  | 3.28%                    | 6.12%                        | +2.84%                   |
| <b>Run for Office</b>  | 3.28%                    | 2.04%                        | -1.24%                   |
| <b>Protest</b>   | 8.20%                    | 4.08%                        | -4.12%                   |

In Table A, the ‘protest’ activity is shaded in a different color because it is the only one of the options that is considered a form of negative participation. As explained in the previous chapter, a ‘negative’ form of political participation generally refers to direct action, or activities that circumvent a polity’s institutional framework to enact more immediate change in a more assertive way. Because negative participation operates differently and is driven by factors

different to those that encourage positive participation, the act of protesting should be considered separately from the rest of the activities included in this question.

The final way to observe the first dependent variable of political participation is political informedness, considered by many experts to be a key indicator of political efficacy and engagement (Milner, 2002; Reichert, 2016; Almond and Verba, 1963). Ultimately, indigenous respondents reported being slightly more politically informed than their non-indigenous counterparts. Overall, the sample population appeared to be fairly well-informed, with only 12.26% of respondents claiming to be poorly informed or not at all informed about Mexican politics. Across the population, 57.55% claimed to be informed, and 30.19% said that they were only slightly informed. Among indigenous respondents, 58.86% said that they were politically informed, 32.73% said that they were only a little bit informed, and only 9.09% said that they were not informed. For each of these categories, indigenous respondents exhibited better results than the survey's average. Non-indigenous respondents, however, did slightly worse, with 55.32% claiming to be politically informed, 29.79% claiming to be only a little bit informed, and 14.89% claiming to be politically uninformed. Therefore, according to the respondents' self-assessments of their own levels of political knowledge, indigenous individuals appear to be slightly more politically informed than non-indigenous respondents.

I returned to the same LAPOP dataset to see the extent to which respondents report participating in other political activities aside from voting. The LAPOP questionnaire does not ask about all of the specific political activities that I included in my survey, but it does inquire about participation in protests and attendance at political meetings or gatherings. Overall, the data from this survey cycle showed little to no variation in participation between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents. The data showed that 4.48% of respondents reported having

participated in a protest in the year before taking the survey. This percentage was slightly higher for indigenous respondents at 6.25%, with only 4.40% of non-indigenous respondents reporting the same. This finding is consistent with my own, and supports the validity of my finding that indigenous peoples are slightly more active in forms of negative political participation, and that this difference may be statistically significant in a study with a higher sample size. According to the same dataset, 12.75% of respondents had attended a political meeting in the previous year, with little variation between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents. These findings are consistent with my own that indigenous peoples generally participate at statistically equivalent rates in many forms of positive political activities.

### **3.5 Results: Political Sentiment**

The rest of the survey addresses the second dependent variable of political sentiment, or attitudes and beliefs about the government. The first way that I sought to measure this was through a feeling thermometer of the then-president and for the local mayor. These feeling thermometers offer an insight into public opinion of political leaders, and a comparison between opinions of local and national leaders. The first feeling thermometer of the then-President Enrique Peña Nieto of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) party exhibited rather negative sentiment overall towards the leader, with a mean score of 3.41 on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 signifying a very negative opinion, 5 neutral, and 10 very positive). In fact, some respondents took it upon themselves to write in negative scores, which does not reflect well on Peña Nieto. These negative attitudes are consistent with national estimates of the then-President's approval, which was rather low at 28% as of September 2017 (Pew Global). It is unclear if this negative score is more a reflection of the president himself, or of the PRI party, or both. Interestingly, indigenous respondents exhibited a slightly higher average approval of the president; when



compared with the average, indigenous respondents had a lower percentage of negative opinions (1-4) of the president, and a much higher percentage of neutral (5) opinions. The average score of the then-president by indigenous respondents was slightly higher than the average at 3.58. Non-indigenous respondents had an overall more negative opinion of President Peña Nieto, with a vast majority (73.91%) giving an unfavorable score.

The second feeling thermometer was of the *Presidente Municipal*, or mayor, which was different depending on the location in which I was conducting surveys. In all locations where I conducted surveys, coincidentally, the local mayors were of the same political party, *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional* (MORENA). Therefore, although the feeling thermometers were assessing different leaders in different cities, they all shared the same constant of measuring the same political party, MORENA, at the local level of governance. The average score of the mayor among indigenous respondents was very high at 5.74, while non-indigenous respondents provided a more negative average score of 4.00. The relationship between indigeneity and the feeling thermometer for the local mayor is strong, with a P value of 0.002, making it statistically significant with a 99% confidence interval. Overall, opinions of mayors were significantly higher than those of the president, with an average of 4.94 on a scale of 1 to 10 (compare with the president's score of 3.41). Indigenous respondents generally had a much higher approval of their *Presidente Municipal*, providing significantly fewer negative reviews, and twice as many positive reviews as non-indigenous respondents. Like with the first feeling thermometer, it is not entirely clear whether these reviews are reflective of public opinion of the individual leaders, or of the political party (MORENA) that they represent.

These feeling thermometers confirm the prediction that respondents overall will favor the local government over the federal. The low ratings for then-President Enrique Peña Nieto were

in line with expectations—however, the tendency for indigenous respondents to be less critical of the president was unanticipated. The feeling thermometer of the *Presidente Municipal* also begins to demonstrate that all respondents, but especially indigenous respondents, have a higher view of the local government. Also, since all of the surveys were conducted in locations where the local government was under MORENA leadership, the much higher preference for the local leader among indigenous respondents confirms the support that MORENA has among indigenous citizens. These data comparing leadership at the local and federal levels between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents set a foundation for the results from data from a future section, which also compares the local and federal government.

The next series of questions measures respondents' opinions of and preferences for government spending. Each question is different, but they all pose the same 10 options: the economy, anticorruption initiatives, the environment, education, human rights, anti-drug initiatives, expanding the military, or other. These questions were designed to gauge the extent to which respondents believe that the government is investing in areas that they want the government to invest in. Generally, I expected that respondents would be more in favor of spending in the economy, education, and human rights, and less in favor of spending in anticorruption, anti-drug initiatives, or expanding the military. If there were to be any difference in opinions between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents, I expected that indigenous respondents would be more partial to spending in education and human rights, because they are both areas where indigenous peoples in the state are most underserved. I also expect that indigenous respondents may be less likely to support spending in anti-drug initiatives or the military, because both the War on Drugs and the Mexican military have been known for their connections to human rights violations against the country's poor and indigenous peoples.

Overall, the responses to these four questions largely confirmed my expectations, with respondents generally demonstrating a preference for spending in education and the economy, and reduced spending in the security sector. The first question, which asks how the respondent would choose to invest \$100 pesos in the government, showed that respondents are overwhelmingly in favor of public investment in the economy and in education, each of which was chosen by 37.84% of respondents. As anticipated, the least popular options were anti-drug initiatives (2.70%) and military spending (3.60%). It appears that, for indigenous respondents, the most popular investment options are education (45.00%), the economy (28.33%), and the environment (10.00%). For non-indigenous respondents, the most popular options were the economy (47.92%) and education (29.17%), with all other options earning less than 10% of support. These results suggest that indigenous peoples are more supportive of education spending, while non-indigenous individuals are more in favor of spending in the economy; however, both groups viewed both the economy and education as important investments.

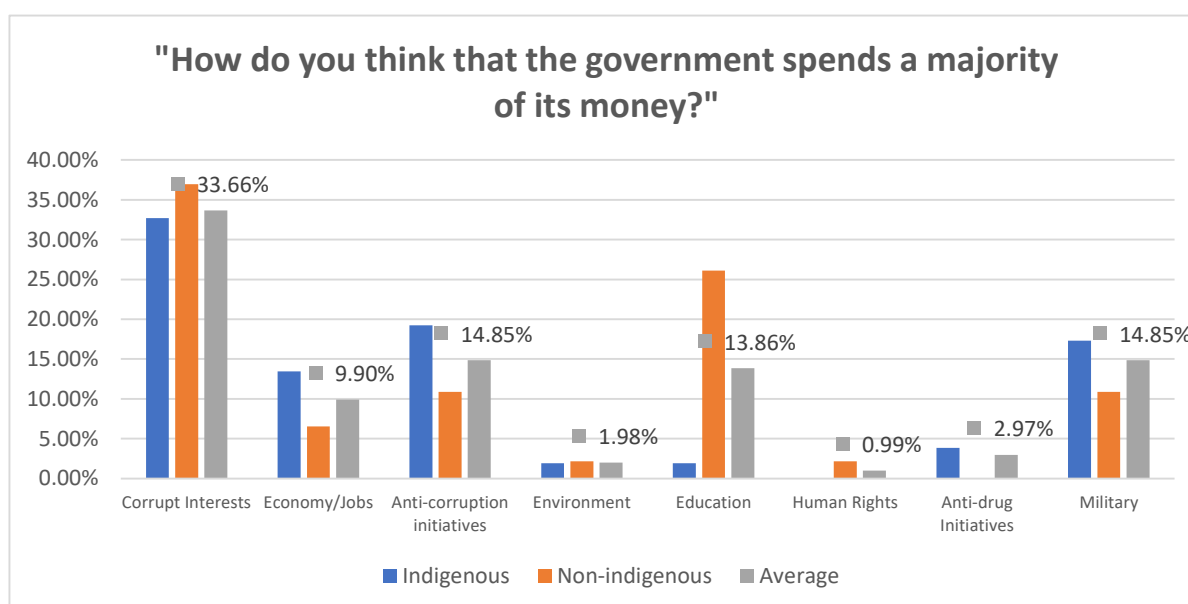
Another question in this section asked respondents what they would like for the government to invest in *more* if they could choose. Like with the previous question, the responses were more or less in line with my expectations: The most popular options for this question were the economy (36.61%), education (31.25%), and anti-corruption initiatives (12.50%). Overall, when comparing results between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents, there was not much variation. Both groups preferred increased spending in the economy, anti-corruption, and education. The only main discrepancy here is that indigenous respondents were more partial to human rights spending (11.48%) when compared with non-indigenous respondents (4.17%). This is interesting, and makes sense considering that indigenous rights are

closely tied with the human rights dialogue in Mexico. However, this difference is not statistically significant.

The next question asks respondents what they would want the government to invest in *less*, with the same options offered. Consistent with expectations, the most popular option by far was military spending, which was chosen by 52.34% of respondents. Other common selections included anti-drug initiatives (14.95%) and anti-corruption (12.15%). Once again, results between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents were not remarkably different, as members of both groups agreed on reduced spending for anti-drug initiatives and military spending. However, notable is that 19.30% of indigenous respondents favored reduced spending on anticorruption, while only 2.13% of non-indigenous respondents made the same selection. This difference is statistically significant at a 99% confidence interval.

There was one in this series of questions that presented a few surprises that warrant further investigation. This question asked how the respondent believes that the government spends the majority of its money, then proposed the same ten options. Interestingly, instead of selecting one of the options provided, many respondents opted to write in, in some form, ‘their own corrupt interests.’ Some of the more colorful write-ins included, “*¡en sus propios bolsillos!*” and “*¡uso personal!*” to name a few. Although it was not technically an option on the survey, it was so common that I ultimately included ‘corruption’ as an option when calculating the results and found that it was actually by far the most popular option, with 33.66% of respondents writing it in. Other popular choices for this question were military spending (14.85%), anti-corruption initiatives (14.85%), and education (13.86%). The least common options were the economy (9.90%) human rights (1.02%), anti-drug initiatives (2.04%), and the environment (2.04%). When separated between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents, this question

displayed a rather significant discrepancy of perceived government spending between the two groups. For indigenous respondents, the most popular choices for this question were corruption (32.69%), military spending (17.31%), and anti-corruption initiatives (19.23%). For non-indigenous respondents, however, the most common options were corruption (36.96%) and education (26.09%). It is interesting that education was such a common choice among non-indigenous respondents because only 1.92% of indigenous respondents made the same selection, showing a clear difference in perceptions of public spending; however, this finding is consistent with the notion that indigenous peoples lack access to education, or that the government does not invest as much money into schools in or near areas with high indigenous populations. The differences in responses to this question can be seen in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4: ‘How do you think that the government spends a majority of its money?’**

The following eight questions are designed with the following format: each poses a statement, then asks the respondent the extent to which he/she agrees with the statement on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree). Many of these questions are designed to

compare respondents' opinions of the government at the federal and local levels. Like with the feeling thermometers for the president and *Presidente Municipal*, the initial expectation for these questions was that all respondents would have a higher opinion of the local government, and that this trend would be especially strong among indigenous respondents. I expected that all respondents would be critical of the federal government, but that indigenous respondents would be even more so. Ultimately, this expectation was more or less accurate: respondents of all groups were consistently more critical of the federal government, and had a higher opinion of the local government. In one case, indigenous respondents did show an especially high approval of the local government; however, this was not a consistent trend throughout all questions.

The first series of questions designed in this format largely fulfilled my expectations; the proposed statement is, "my federal government is effective." The average score for this statement was 3.59, leaning towards the view that the government is not effective. Indigenous respondents only had a slightly more negative opinion, averaging at 3.62, but this difference is not statistically significant. The next question poses the same statement, but in relation to the *local* government. For this question, the average score was 3.24, slightly more positive than that for the federal government in the previous question. Indigenous respondents had a slightly more positive perception of the local government's effectiveness with an average score of 3.20 compared to non-indigenous respondents' opinion of 3.29; however, again, this difference was not statistically significant. Though there were no major differences between indigenous and non-indigenous opinions for these two questions, they still produced the expected results that both groups would view the local government in a more positive light.

The following question requires the respondent to select the extent to which he/she agrees with the statement, "My federal government represents me and my interests." The average

selection for this statement was 3.61, which falls between ‘neither agree nor disagree’ and ‘disagree’. For indigenous respondents, the score was slightly more negative at 3.64, compared with non-indigenous respondents who chose a slightly more neutral stance at 3.58. However, this difference is not statistically significant. The next question poses the same statement in relation to the *local* government. Again, the overall result for this question was slightly more positive, with an average opinion of 3.35. Indigenous respondents agreed with this statement to a higher degree, on average selecting 3.20, contrasting with the slightly more negative opinion among non-indigenous respondents, who scored this statement with an average of 3.54. Overall, the results for these two questions were more in line with my expectations, with indigenous respondents being more critical of the federal government, and having a more favorable view of the local government.

The last of these questions comparing the federal and local levels of government poses the statement, “My federal government tries to fight against discrimination towards *indígenas* in Mexico.” The degree of agreement for this statement was actually more positive than expected, averaging at 3.31. There was no statistically significant discrepancy in responses for this question between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents. For the next question, which proposed the same question in relation to the local government, responses were again more positive overall, averaging a score of 3.13. Interestingly, indigenous respondents had a more positive reaction to this statement, providing an average score of 2.96. Non-indigenous respondents had a slightly more negative opinion, averaging at 3.34. The responses to this question were quite surprising, since I expected that this issue would be a rather easy one to be critical of. However, both non-indigenous and indigenous respondents appear to view that both levels of government have worked to fight against ethnic discrimination. This was especially

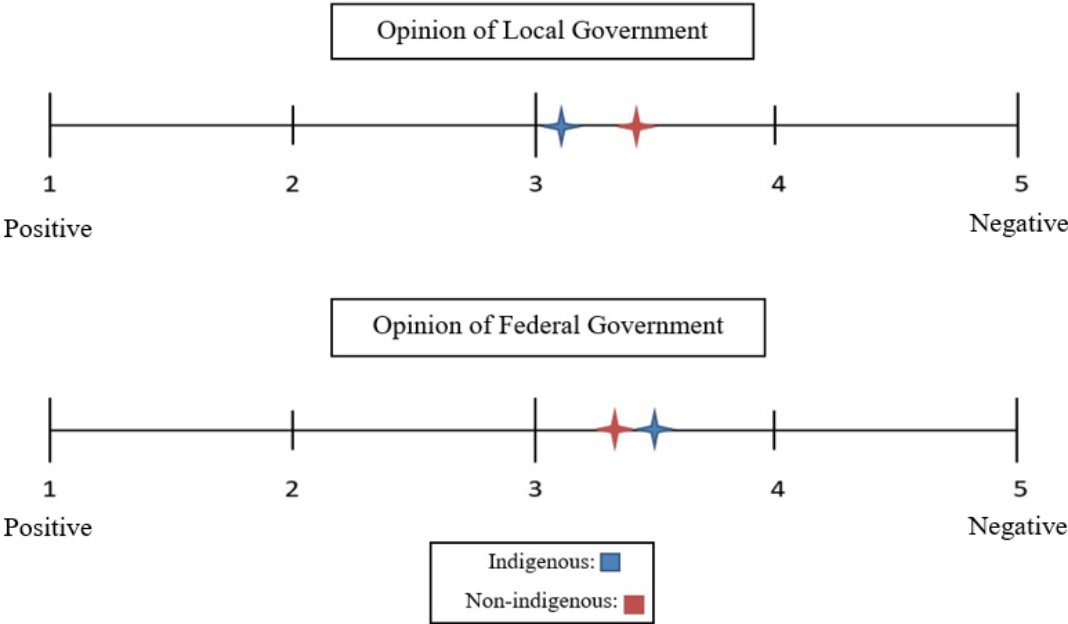
surprising in that indigenous respondents had a much more positive response than non-indigenous respondents. These data suggest that, in Yucatán, discrimination against indigenous peoples is not as severe as one would expect, which is a pleasant surprise.

Since it is a tad difficult to compare all of these opinion averages separately, for the questions that were designed to compare attitudes towards the federal versus local government I calculated the average scores to formulate an *overall* comparison of respondent attitudes towards the federal versus local government. This form of comparison provides a broader understanding of trends in respondents' attitudes towards the different levels of government, and how this differs between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents. After calculating the mean scores for each of the questions posed in this format, it appears that the overall average rating of the local government is 3.39, and the average score for the federal government is more negative at 3.51. Indigenous respondents exhibit a more positive attitude towards the local government, and a slightly more negative attitude towards the federal government than non-indigenous respondents. These differences can be seen in Figure 5 on the following page.

This is reflective of the perceptions of local and federal leaders shown by the feeling thermometers earlier in the survey; similarly, these feeling thermometers demonstrated a higher overall opinion of the local leader over the then-president. These thermometers also indicated a much higher average opinion of the mayor and a slightly higher opinion of the president among indigenous respondents when compared to non-indigenous respondents. The only inconsistency here is that, in the questions comparing local and federal government performance, indigenous respondents had a more negative opinion, while they had a slightly higher opinion of the then-president than non-indigenous respondents. Aside from this slight difference, however, the



opinions of the local and federal government appear to be reflective of the opinions of local and federal leaders recorded in the feeling thermometers.



**Figure 5: Local vs. Federal Government**

To confirm the validity of these results, I again turned to 2014 data from LAPOP to compare how its respondents view the federal versus local government. First, these data strongly confirmed my finding that people overall prefer the local government over the federal government. When asked, “To what extent do you have confidence in the local government?” 42.90% of respondents said that they were confident, with 36.73% of respondents saying that they do not have much confidence in the local government. When dividing these responses between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents, it appears that indigenous respondents have a much more favorable view of the local government than non-indigenous respondents. 60.94% of indigenous respondents said that they were confident in the local government, versus only 42.06% of non-indigenous respondents. This correlation is statistically significant at a 99%

confidence interval. When asked the same question regarding the president, 52.22% of respondents overall said that they are not confident in the president. These data overwhelmingly support my findings regarding attitudes towards the local versus federal government, and the higher preference among indigenous peoples for the local government.

The next question on my survey is posed in the same format as the six previous, though it does not offer the same comparison of federal to local government. This question simply asks the extent to which the respondent agrees with the statement: “The Mexican government (federal and local) respects the rights and needs of indigenous peoples as much as those of all other citizens.” The response to this question was overwhelmingly negative, with 51.49% of respondents disagreeing to some extent. The average score for this question was 3.47, and the difference between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents was not statistically significant. The final question in this format proposes, “My government prioritizes the well-being of its people.” The average level of agreement to this question was 3.51; indigenous respondents again had a slightly more positive reaction, scoring the statement with an average of 3.45. Non-indigenous respondents scored a more negative average of 3.59. This difference was not statistically significant.

The final question of this survey measures the extent to which respondents agree with a specific initiative in the state of Yucatán designed to provide services and infrastructure to poor indigenous Maya communities. Like in the previous questions, the respondent is then asked to choose one of 5 options, ranging from, ‘I completely agree with this initiative’ to, ‘I completely disagree with this initiative.’ Reactions to this proposed initiative were overwhelmingly positive, with 79.00% of respondents agreeing to some extent. Only 8.00% of respondents disagreed with the initiative and, to my surprise, *all* were indigenous. Overall, indigenous respondents appeared

to agree with the initiative to a lesser extent than non-indigenous respondents. This is a puzzling finding, and it is unclear why those indigenous respondents disagreed with the initiative. One potential explanation comes from an anecdotal experience with an indigenous community outside of the city in which I was staying. I noticed when I was in the town that there was a building that had apparently been built by the government to provide potable water and other resources to the community. I commented on this observation, and a woman from the community explained to me that they never use the building, because they do not trust the government and do not want help from the government. This perspective surprised me, and stuck with me throughout the trip; this notion that indigenous communities do not want the government's assistance could be a potential reason for which a few indigenous respondents opposed this initiative. However, to say with certainty would require further investigation.

### **3.6 Results: Interviews**

The interviews were semi-structured, with a few standard questions that all participants were asked, and others that were designed and tailored specifically for each interviewee. The interviewees were primarily selected through a purposive sampling technique; I had a contact with a local in the state of Yucatán who referred me to a few people to interview. Because this field research was conducted just before a series of major elections in Mexico, I chose to interview individuals who were either running for local office or were involved in the local campaigns for various political parties. Therefore, these interviews are best characterized as elite interviews, since they were conducted with individuals who had a certain level of expertise on local and national politics, and on the specific campaigns of different political parties.

Elite interviewing is a rather unique method in that it poses a different power dynamic between interviewer and interviewee; since the 'elite' interviewee by definition is more

knowledgeable of the issues being discussed, he/she has the option to be dishonest and mislead the interviewer in many ways (Berry, 2002; Mikecz, 2012; Morris, 2009). Additionally, because the elite has a position of higher status and is more knowledgeable, he/she may be likely to lead the conversation astray and avoid addressing important points (Berry, 2002). For these reasons, the elite interview method offers some obstacles to ensuring the reliability and validity of the information gathered in the interview. However, there are certainly some ways around this problem, including preparing by researching the issue and forming standard questions, establishing a position of ‘informed outsider,’ and identifying interviewee bias (Berry, 2002; Mikecz, 2012). For my interviews with elites in Yucatán, I believe that I was effective in using these mechanisms to ensure that the information gathered was as reliable as possible. I had an extensive knowledge of Mexican party politics and formulated a few questions prior to each interview to make sure that I would get the needed information out of each interview. Additionally, I think that the bias with each interviewee was generally rather easy to identify, and I took this into account when I was reviewing and analyzing the interviews later on. I ultimately interviewed seven elite individuals in total. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, I will refer to them as Entrevistado/a 1-7.

The first, Entrevistado 1, was a candidate for local political office under the leftist MORENA party, and did not identify as indigenous. My second interview was a bit longer, and was with three different individuals at once. The first of these three, Entrevistado 2, was a bureaucrat of the local city government, and identified as *mestizo*. Entrevistada 3 was a *comisaria*, or local leader, of a small Maya community in the northeast of the Yucatán. The third person in this interview, Entrevistado 4, was a local political activist and a volunteer for the state-wide campaign for MORENA. Both Entrevistados 3 and 4 were of indigenous Maya

descent. These three interviewees knew each other and had worked together, and were all avid supporters of the MORENA party. The next interview was with a *mestiza* individual, Entrevistada 5, who did not hold any political office but had spent years of her life working as a volunteer for the conservative PRI party. Entrevistado 6 was a local political candidate for PAN, a center-right party, and was also not indigenous. My final interview was with Entrevistado 7, a *comisario*, an indigenous local leader of a small community outside of one of Yucatán's major cities. Overall, some of the main themes that I covered throughout the interviews were observed trends in indigenous political participation, anti-establishment political sentiment, and persisting obstacles to participatory equality in the Yucatán.

As I explained in Chapter 2, the existing literature shows a bit of dissonance between experts regarding what the nature of indigenous political participation should be, and what the observed trends may be. Interestingly, differences in perceptions revealed through my interviews reflect those same inconsistencies. Entrevistado 1 maintained that “it is a fact that *indígenas* do not participate as much,” and attributed this to the tendency of existing political parties to use indigenous peoples as tools to gain political support, but the failure to properly include them in the political process. Entrevistado 6 echoed this opinion, claiming that indigenous people do *want* to participate, but are limited by inadequate socioeconomic resources and a general lack of opportunity. Entrevistados 4 and 7, however, claimed that, though indigenous peoples may participate less in some places, in Yucatán they *do* participate. Entrevistados 2, 3, and 4, meanwhile, argued that it *used* to be the case that indigenous peoples in Yucatán didn't participate—but that, since the rise of indigenous politics and parties such as MORENA, this has changed. Entrevistado 2 declared that, because indigenous peoples identify with MORENA, they have ‘broken this tendency’ of low participation and have become more politically engaged since

the party's conception. Worth noting is that Entrevistados 2, 3, and 4, were all in some capacity engaged with MORENA and its campaign, and that this provided a certain bias and incentive to frame the party in a positive light. However, while these opinions are biased, they are certainly still valid in analyzing perceptions of rates of participation among the state's indigenous populations. The differences of opinion between all interviewees indicate that, even within a small state, there are significant discrepancies in the understanding of trends in indigenous political participation.

Despite this dissonance, there was one trend that all interviewees consistently acknowledged: the prominence of negative and anti-establishment political sentiment. Supporters of MORENA (Entrevistados. 1, 2, 3, and 4) claimed that Mexico's historic parties (PRI, PAN, and PRD) were known for corruption, violations of human rights, and the exploitation of indigenous peoples. These interviewees argued that this discontent with the existing parties is part of why MORENA had become so popular among indigenous peoples and other groups that had been negatively affected by the actions of institutional parties. Entrevistada 3 made an interesting point in connecting this negative political sentiment with indigenous politics: she argued that there *are* certainly grievances or expectations from the government that are unique to indigenous peoples and the *comisarias*. However, she said that, due to the severity of corruption in Mexico, most indigenous communities are less focused on these specific grievances at the moment, and instead are united with the rest of the population in the priority of fighting political corruption. Entrevistados 5 and 6, members of other parties, acknowledged this sentiment and admitted that the actions of the PRI and PAN had damaged their support among indigenous constituents. Entrevistada 5 explained that many party officials and candidates have had to distance themselves from the PRI to avoid association with the party's reputation for corruption.

Entrevistado 7, the *comisario*, also recognized the existence of anti-establishment sentiment; however, he explained that, because *comisarios* are not allowed to associate with political parties, it had not had much of an impact on activity or participation at a local level.

Finally, I asked all interviewees what they believed were some of the persisting obstacles to participatory equality between indigenous and non-indigenous constituents. Overall, despite the dissonance in opinions regarding trends of political participation, many of the interviewees agreed on a few key factors that continue to hinder indigenous participation. One thing that many agreed to be an obstacle was illiteracy and the general lack of education in poor Maya communities. 6 out of the 7 interviewees identified that many people living in *comisarias* are not literate in Spanish, and argued that this both makes it difficult for them to participate, and makes them a target for corrupt politicians. Another problem that a few identified was clientelism, or the corrupt practice of vote-buying, which is often used to gain support among poor and vulnerable populations, many of which are indigenous. Entrevistados 2, 3, 5, and 6 all identified clientelism as a factor that fosters negative political opinion and discourages individuals from participating in the political process. Entrevistada 5 emphasized the problem of negative political sentiment, claiming that it has caused many—not just *indígenas*—to abstain from politics altogether. Another prominent obstacle, which Entrevistados 1 and 6 both identified, is a general lack of opportunity to become involved in the higher levels of the political process, which has discouraged indigenous individuals from participating at all, and has made it seem as though their voices are not legitimately acknowledged or valued in the political sphere.

#### **4.0 Discussion and Revised Argument for the Exception of Yucatán**

The seemingly contradictory literature relating to indigeneity, oppression, and activism, and the effects on political participation, led me to my research question, which asked what the current levels of political sentiment and participation look like among indigenous peoples today. I proposed two hypotheses: Hypothesis A predicted that sentiment and participation would be lower among indigenous respondents, and Hypothesis B proposed that sentiment and participation would be equivalent between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents. The data from my surveys and interviews prove Hypothesis A to be completely null, and largely support Hypothesis B for the case of Yucatán; however, the data, in tandem with my surveys, also raise some new questions regarding Hypothesis B and unexpected results for both participation and sentiment. These results beg further explanation, and raise the question of whether these results are representative of overall trends in indigenous political participation, or if there are certain characteristics specific to the case of Yucatán that make this study a special one. Ultimately, I argue for the latter: that there are particularities to this case that make Yucatán the exception, rather than the rule, to trends in political participation.

##### **4.1 Dependent Variable I: Political Participation**

When analyzing reported electoral participation, it appears that indigenous respondents are *much* more active when compared to non-indigenous respondents. According to the surveys, indigenous respondents turned out at a rate of around 95% in both 2012 and 2018, an extraordinarily high number. For non-indigenous respondents, voter turnout was much lower in 2012 (69.23%), but then increased substantially to over 80% in 2018—a number much higher than the national average, but still lower than the survey average for indigenous respondents. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these data generally exhibit much higher rates of electoral



participation when compared with nation-wide and state-wide statistics on voter turnout. As indicated earlier, one possible explanation for this is the notion of ‘favorability bias’ in surveys. Since I cannot be certain for the reasons for these high rates of reported electoral turnout at this time, however, I will continue with the assumption that these data reflect a higher rate of political participation among indigenous respondents.

The second measurement of political participation considers the extent to which respondents participate in specific political activities aside from voting. For the positive forms of political participation offered in the question (presenting a petition, volunteering for a political campaign, participating in an interest group, running for office, and protesting), it appears that indigenous respondents and non-indigenous respondents participate at equivalent levels. Although the data showed a slightly higher percentage of indigenous respondents participating in most political activities, due to the small sample size none of these results are statistically significant. Further research with a larger sample would be necessary to evaluate the extent of these differences, and the sentiments behind the positive and negative forms of participation.

The final method of analyzing the variable of political participation is through levels of political informedness, which is generally considered to be strongly linked to political engagement. The survey data indicates that, according to their own self-analyses, indigenous respondents are slightly more politically informed than non-indigenous respondents. Coupled with the other data that demonstrate higher political participation among indigenous peoples, this finding supports the conventional belief that political informedness has a positive relationship with political participation (Almond and Verba, 1963; Reichert, 2016; Milner, 2002). Altogether, these three measurements of political participation consistently demonstrate that indigenous peoples in Yucatán are more politically engaged than their non-indigenous counterparts,

discrediting the first part of Hypothesis A, and even going beyond the expectations of equal participation proposed by Hypothesis B.

#### **4.2 Dependent Variable II: Political Sentiment**

Overall, there does not appear to be a significant difference in political sentiment towards the government as a whole between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents. Instead, the data from the survey's feeling thermometers and questions regarding specific beliefs about the government exposed very negative opinions towards the government across the board, regardless of ethnic background. However, when specifically analyzing opinions towards the local and federal government, there does appear to be a significant distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents, with indigenous respondents more partial toward the local government. This trend can be seen in the feeling thermometers, which displayed a much more positive opinion of the individual in the position of *Presidente Municipal* among indigenous respondents, and a much more negative attitude towards the then-president. The same tendency is apparent in the extent to which respondents agreed with positive statements regarding the federal and local government. Though all reactions were rather negative, the responses to these questions exhibit the trend that indigenous respondents are slightly more partial towards the local government than non-indigenous respondents. With regard to the federal government, respondents exhibited an overall very negative attitude, with little discrepancy between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents.

The rest of the questions, intended to compare respondents' opinions about government spending, demonstrated a similar trend of considerably low political sentiment among all groups. Overall, indigenous and non-indigenous peoples alike viewed the government as corrupt, and failing to invest in areas that the people view as needing investment. Indigenous respondents

demonstrated slightly more cynical beliefs about how the government spends its money; this can be seen in the expressed desire for education spending, but the very low percentage of indigenous respondents who view that the government invests in education. The data gathered from these questions express that *yucatecos* overall have a very negative perception of government spending, and that this tendency may be slightly stronger among indigenous respondents. Coupled with the other findings concerning political sentiment, these questions demonstrate low political sentiment overall, a more positive attitude towards the local government among indigenous peoples, and a general perception of the government as corrupt and not representing the interests of the people.

Worth noting is that, without conducting further research, it is not entirely clear whether indigenous prefer the local government in general, or if the respondents' preference for the local government is based in partisan alignment with MORENA, which was in power at a local level in all survey locations at the time of this study. If indigenous citizens do have a greater preference for the local government, it is likely that this was enhanced by the fact that the local government was governed by the MORENA party at the time. It would be interesting to see if this relationship is still as strong today, as Mexico's new president is also from the MORENA party. All that is clear from these data, however, is that indigenous respondents do appear to hold a more favorable view of the local government. The second and supplementary part of Hypothesis A, which predicted that indigenous respondents would exhibit lower political sentiment, is therefore found to be null; in turn, these results lend more general support to Hypothesis B, but again even go beyond its expectations as they indicate *higher* political sentiment for indigenous respondents, at least towards the local government.

In light of these findings from the surveys and interviews, it is necessary to turn to secondary literature and examine the context a bit more in order to determine how to interpret these data. These findings disprove Hypothesis A and support the alternative hypothesis, demonstrating that indigenous peoples in Yucatán *do* actually participate in politics. However, through the data alone it is unclear whether this finding is representative of trends in indigenous political participation overall, or if it is only indicative of the isolated case of Yucatán. After analyzing the case thoroughly, I choose the latter option: I argue that, in most cases, given historical oppression and persisting political and socioeconomic inequalities, indigenous peoples *should* exhibit lower political sentiment and lower levels of political participation. However, the specific history and socio-political context in Yucatán offers a few contingencies that change this tendency. Therefore, it is clear that trends in indigenous political participation are far from static; rather, there are many factors that influence participatory tendencies, and some cases, such as that of Yucatán, may provide the right circumstances to allow for equal participation among all groups. Alas, instead of opting for one of my initial hypotheses, I developed a synthesis of the two that makes sense in a broader international context, but also explains the results of my study in Yucatán. This new and revised argument, based on the data from my study, is as follows:

*Post-research argument: In spite of positive democratic advancements in Mexico and throughout Latin America in recent decades, and despite the positive changes associated with the Global Indigenous Movement, indigenous peoples in most cases will exhibit (1) lower levels of satisfaction with the government and (2) lower levels of political participation when compared with non-indigenous or mestizo counterparts. However, in the case of Yucatán, this trend is reversed and indigenous peoples do participate due to four factors, in order based on their significance:*

- I. Ethnic inequality is not as high in Yucatán as in other parts of the country*
- II. Ethnicity is not a very salient political issue in Yucatán*
- III. The substantive representation of indigenous peoples in Mexico and in Yucatán has increased in recent years, and*
- IV. The state of Yucatán has a unique atmosphere of pride in indigenous identity*

### **4.3 Revised Argument**

Upon analyzing the information from my surveys and interviews conducted in Yucatán, it became even more starkly clear how much political behaviors can vary under different political contexts and even between regions of the same country. Although the literature may describe a political trend in one part of a country, citizens elsewhere in the same country may exhibit completely opposite tendencies. My data from Yucatán provides evidence that contextual or situational factors can have profound effects on political behaviors and outcomes. I argue that, in most cases around the world, the initial hypothesis (Hypothesis A) would generally be accurate in predicting that socioeconomic and political factors should have the effect of depressing indigenous political participation. However, in the case of Yucatán, there are a few specific factors that inhibit this trend and cause the opposite. I argue that these factors have encouraged and augmented indigenous political engagement and, in other cases where these same factors are present, the same political behavior may be reflected.

The first and most important factor that reverses this demobilizing trend is that ethnic inequality, or socioeconomic inequality between ethnic groups, is not as significant in Yucatán as in the rest of Mexico. Second, as explained in an earlier chapter, ethnicity is not a very salient issue in the state of Yucatán when compared to other countries with significant indigenous populations, and even to other parts of Mexico. Third, in recent years the state of Yucatán has seen political leadership from more candidates with substantive indigenous interests in mind, which may have had an effect on indigenous participation. Finally, though there is certainly still a degree of stigma against those with indigenous background, discrimination against indígenas in Yucatán appears to be less severe than in many other parts of the world, or in other regions of Mexico where indigenous peoples do not comprise as large of a percentage of the population.

Instead, in Yucatán many indigenous peoples have a great deal of pride in their ethnicity, which may have a tangible impact on the way that they participate in social and political activities.

Overall, I argue that these factors together have served to mobilize the state's indigenous Maya population, and to defy traditional expectations of indigenous political engagement.

One of the most prominent factors that influences rates of political participation among indigenous peoples in the case of Yucatán is that ethnic inequality, or socioeconomic inequality that exists along ethnic boundaries, does not appear to be as high in Yucatán as in other parts of Mexico and in other countries. In other words, while socioeconomic classes often reflect ethnic differences in many countries with significant indigenous populations, or in other parts of the country, this is not the case in Yucatán. Although economic inequality is a pertinent issue in Yucatán as in the rest of Mexico, ethnicity or indigeneity is not necessarily a determinant of socioeconomic status. As Villareal (2010) identifies in his study, inequality in Mexico generally tends to be highly correlated with ethnic background, with Mexicans of European descent or with lighter skin color much more likely to have a higher socioeconomic status than Mexicans with darker skin and an indigenous background.

Statistics from a government report confirm this notion, showing that throughout Mexico a disproportionate percentage of people with indigenous background live under the poverty line when compared with the non-indigenous or mestizo population (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, 2013-2018). However, scholars with a regional focus on Yucatán have noticed that the state does not necessarily conform to this trend (Armstrong-Fumero, 2013; Gabbert, 2004). Instead, inequality in Yucatán has developed in ways that are rather unique within Mesoamerican identity politics, with high levels of inequality within *all* ethnic groups, and with many successful people of indigenous Maya background. Therefore, while Yucatán may still have a high degree of

inequality, it is not necessarily *ethnic* inequality, since economic classes are not consistently stratified according to ethnic background. This is likely related to the fact that ethnicity is not a very salient issue in Yucatán, which I will discuss in greater detail in a later paragraph.

One potential reason for the low level of ethnic inequality in Yucatán is that, in recent decades, indigenous peoples have had unique access to the markets through the tourism industry. Bordering Quintana Roo, which houses many of the country's most popular beaches, and possessing many of its own tourist attractions related to Maya history, archaeology and culture, the state of Yucatán has expanded its tourist industry dramatically in recent decades. Because much of the state's tourist attractions are connected to its Maya history, indigenous Maya *yucatecos* have had the opportunity to profit from the growing tourism industry in ways that non-indigenous Yucatecans cannot (Armstrong-Fumero, 2013). Although the rise in the region's market for tourism certainly hasn't *solved* the problem of economic disparities between ethnic groups, it has undeniably alleviated the disproportionality of earnings, providing indigenous Maya individuals with employment and other opportunities for professional advancement (Armstrong-Fumero, 2013; Mattiace, 2009). As an example, the Yucatán Jays, a small-scale eco-tourism operation that teaches tourists about traditional indigenous culture and local wildlife, was founded and is managed today by indigenous owners. This organization has provided a source of income and livelihood for the indigenous owners and employees, and provides a clear example of the extent to which tourism has positively impacted the economic standing of many members of the state's indigenous population.

The second factor that makes Yucatán a special case, which is likely related to the first, is that ethnicity is not a very salient issue in the state. Mexico is often automatically associated with the Zapatista movement, one of the most famous examples of a successful indigenous political

uprising during the Global Indigenous Movement. However, what most do not know is that the sentiment that led to the formation of the EZLN movement, and the effects of this political clash, were not universally experienced throughout Mexico. Interestingly, although the state of Yucatán is not very far geographically from Chiapas, Yucatán is contrarily known for *never* having had a significant indigenous political organization or movement during the same time period (Armstrong-Fumero, 2013; Gabbert, 2004; Mattiace, 2009).

Yucatán-expert Shannan Mattiace (2009) outlines the reasons for this lack of mobilization: she argues that the issues that peasants in Yucatán had with neoliberalism (i.e. a loss of income and credit) were never closely linked with indigeneity, and that this is one of the reasons why indigeneity has not been an especially salient political issue in Yucatán in the same way that it was in Chiapas or Oaxaca, where *land* was one of the biggest driving forces behind organization. Ethnicity was undeniably an important political issue in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Caste War broke out in what is now the state of Quintana Roo, just west of Yucatán; however, following the end of this conflict in 1904, many indigenous peoples who were not involved in the war largely tried to disassociate from ‘Indianness,’ and from the ethnic polarization that inspired the conflict (Mattiace, 2009). Since the end of the Caste War, Yucatán has not seen any significant episodes of political conflict on the basis of ethnic background, and ethnicity has become less salient of an issue in the political sphere. Later movements were more based on class-based inequalities, and less on ethnic divisions.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, many scholars have observed that in the state of Yucatán and in many other states in Mexico, ethnicity is considered a very fluid concept, with the connotation of an ethnic label varying from region to region, or even from individual to individual (Armstrong-Fumero, 2013; Gabbert, 2004; Mattiace, 2009). Therefore, the designation of



individuals into the category of ‘Maya’ versus *mestizo* versus *indígena*, is not at all fixed, and people often identify with many different ethnic groups. Mattiace (2009) dates this tendency back to the Caste War, and indigenous peoples’ disassociation with ‘Indianness’ and with the ethnic identity of those engaging in violence in the eastern part of the peninsula (p. 141). This fluidity of self-identification between different ethnic groups is something that I can confirm through my own anecdotal experiences. Several times, I would hear individuals who self-identified as *mestizo* or *mestiza* say, ‘Well, we all have some *indígena* in us.’ At times, respondents would appear confused at the third question on my survey, which asks to select the ethnic category with which they identify; many asked if they could select multiple categories. I also became acquainted with an individual who had grown up in a Maya-speaking household, yet chose to identify as *mestizo*. On the other hand, I met many people who I would characterize as *mestizo*, yet who self-identified as Maya, or *indígena*, or both.

This flexibility and adaptability of different ethnic labels, and the reported disinclination by many individuals today to associate fully with one group versus the other, demonstrates that ethnic divisions are not very salient in the case of Yucatán. This is significant, and is not the case in many other countries with large indigenous groups. In many countries, and even in other parts of Mexico where ethnic divisions may be more politicized, the decision to associate with one ethnic group versus another is an important one, with each label bearing meaningful implications and connotations. For example, in regions where there have been significant indigenous political movements, such as Chiapas or in other countries such as in Bolivia or Guatemala, self-identification as indigenous versus *mestizo* may be less flexible and may carry a bit more weight.

The fact that ethnic inequality is not very high in Yucatán, and that ethnic divisions are not a very salient political factor, is compatible with a few of the arguments detailed in my

literature review (Chapter 2). Houle (2015), for example, argues that ethnic diversity in a society can have a negative effect on democracy and political engagement; however, he specifies that there are certain factors that can weaken this relationship. He explains that ethnic divisions are particularly damaging to the democratic process when (1) ethnicity is particularly salient, when (2) inequality between ethnic groups is high, and (3) when inequality *within* ethnic groups is simultaneously low. Therefore, this argument could help to explain why Yucatán is an exception to larger trends in indigenous inequality and democracy; Houle would support that, due to the rise in economic opportunity for indigenous peoples, and the subsequent changes to systems of ethnic inequality, Yucatán presents an exception to this tendency. This argument would help to explain why I did not find a significant discrepancy in levels of political participation between indigenous and non-indigenous individuals in Yucatán. This also suggests that, in locations where inter-group ethnic inequality *is* high, the findings from my data likely wouldn't apply.

A third reason that my case may be a unique exception is the recent rise of AMLO, the newly-elected president of Mexico, and his leftist MORENA party, known for its emphasis on indigenous rights and its subsequent popularity among poor indigenous Mexicans. I argue that, since the end of the PRI's 71-year hold of the presidency in 2000, indigenous peoples in Mexico have developed a new sense of efficacy, a notion which is supported by my interviews. Coupled with the rise of AMLO as a presidential candidate for the first time in 2006, the formation of MORENA as a new political party in 2014, and AMLO's landslide victory in 2018, I expect that this efficacy has materialized through heightened levels of indigenous political participation. Such a connection would strongly support the ideas presented in my interviews that the rise of MORENA has been associated with higher participation by indigenous individuals with whom the party's message resonates. In the case of the cities in which I conducted my surveys,

MORENA had secured elections at the local level and possessed the seat of *Presidente Municipal*; for this reason, this trend of increased substantive representation would likely have a stronger effect in these specific cities than in other parts of the state that were not controlled by the MORENA party.

Worth noting is that these cities in which I did my study are actually a few of the only ones in the state of Yucatán that were governed by MORENA—most of the others had *Presidentes Municipales* from PRI, PAN, or other smaller parties. Therefore, the fact that the municipalities in which I did my research had MORENA governorships, while convenient for the consistency of my study, is quite a coincidence and likely had an impact on my data results. Additionally, though MORENA had not been extremely successful in securing elections at the local level in Yucatán at the time of my survey, the rise in substantive representation of indigenous interests at the national level with the rise of AMLO and MORENA, and with reforms associated with the Global Indigenous Movement, has likely had an impact on rates of indigenous political participation throughout the country. Other countries with large indigenous populations that have not seen similar increases in substantive representation may not exhibit the same rates of indigenous political participation as seen in this study.

The final reason that I identify that makes Yucatán an exception to the expectation of low indigenous participation is that, while racism and discrimination does exist in the state, it is less prevalent than in other parts of the country where indigenous peoples make up less of the population. For reasons that may be linked to the lack of ethnic politics in the state, and to the rise of ethno-tourism, indigenous peoples in the Yucatán are not subject to the same levels of discrimination and stigma based on their ethnic background as are indigenous peoples in other countries, or even in other parts of Mexico (Mattiace, 2009). Instead, many indigenous Maya

individuals express considerable pride in their ethnic background, choosing to wear traditional dress and speak Maya in public. Partly due to the tourism industry in Yucatán and in neighboring Quintana Roo, many people who do *not* identify as Maya still work to learn Maya and become fluent in the language to increase their chances of securing a job in the tourism industry. Throughout the state, indigenous celebrations are common, and tourists are invited to participate and learn more about the unique history and culture of the state. Though there is certainly still a power dynamic at play between the Maya and Spanish cultures and languages (Gabbert, 2004), and though few would argue that racism and discrimination against *indígenas* is absent in its entirety, Yucatán certainly does exhibit a sort of indigenous pride that cannot be found in many other countries with a similar history and ethnic makeup. Though the connection between this indigenous pride and political participation has yet to be empirically proven, it is a characteristic unique to Yucatán that may be indirectly related to the high levels of indigenous political participation identified in my surveys.

To support this notion that discrimination and racism is not as severe in Yucatán as in other parts of Mexico, I turned to 2010 data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) to get a better understanding of the intensity of racism in the country as a whole, and how it varies between states with different ethnic makeups. To do this, I separated all of the data into two groups: the first included states that are known for having large indigenous populations (Chiapas, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, and Veracruz)<sup>12</sup>, and the second included all other states. I compared responses between these two groups to the survey question, “Have you ever felt discriminated against or been mistreated for the way that you speak or your accent?” In states that are not known for having large indigenous populations, only 64.81% of

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<sup>12</sup> In this dataset there were no observations from the state of Yucatán, which is why it is not included in this list.

indigenous respondents<sup>13</sup> reported that they had never received this kind of discrimination. On the other hand, in states with large indigenous populations, 88.89% of indigenous respondents reported that they had never felt discrimination in this way, a much higher number. The difference here in reported experiences with discrimination supports my argument that discrimination may not be as severe in Yucatán, where there is a large indigenous population, as in other parts of the country that have much smaller indigenous populations.

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<sup>13</sup> As with my own survey data, I separated respondents into ‘indigenous’ or ‘non-indigenous’ groups based on their native/maternal language.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

It cannot be disputed that, since the beginning of the era of colonization, indigenous peoples around the world have been profoundly impacted by globalization in myriad ways, the majority of which have been overwhelmingly negative. Save for a few exceptions, indigenous peoples around the world have been subject to severe oppression, ranging from horrific acts such as genocide or forced sterilization, to less explicit forms such as ethnic inequality. In the case of Mexico, the Maya people were subject to a system of quasi-slavery under the immigrant elites, and have subsequently been fighting for the expansion of their rights since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In most cases, the power structures that generated this oppression are still active, resulting in the continued marginalization of indigenous peoples in the social, economic, political, and cultural systems with which they engage. And for many indigenous peoples, the neoliberal economic reforms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century only served to exacerbate poverty and inequalities, and to strip them of some of their most basic rights.

According to conventional thought in the field of Political Science, such a history of oppression can have far-reaching effects for political sentiment and political participation. Existing research in the political and social sciences suggests that the features of most indigenous peoples' histories, including systemic poverty, socioeconomic inequality, and ethnic cleavages, should theoretically hinder the political participation of the affected groups. Scholars argue that inequality between ethnic groups and high poverty levels imply a lack of access to certain basic resources, such as employment or education, that are highly correlated with political participation (Krishna, 2008; Gallego, 2007; Horowitz, 1993). Considering the existing statistics concerning disproportionately high rates of poverty, high rates of illiteracy, lower levels of education, and inadequate access to other basic resources among indigenous peoples in Mexico

and around the world, many scholars would draw the assumption that these groups should exhibit lower levels of political participation.

On the other hand, however, those same scholars must acknowledge the mobilization associated with the Global Indigenous Movement in recent decades, and the undeniable positive political changes that occurred either as a result of these movements, or due to the political developments associated with neoliberal economic reforms during the same time period. As I have noted throughout this thesis, in the time period from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, countries around the world saw a wave of unprecedented indigenous movements forming to demand that their rights be recognized, which I refer to as the Global Indigenous Movement. This movement appears to have formed due to a combination of factors, including a restructuring of prior class-based movements, the aggravation of political and economic conditions caused by neoliberal reforms, and the subsequent expansion of (some) political rights during the same period. These movements were historic for the affected countries, and resulted in positive political changes on national and international scales, ranging from new land protections, to proclamations of the defense of indigenous human rights around the world, to new requirements for indigenous representation in political bodies. There is a body of literature arguing that the increased mobilization associated with the Global Indigenous Movement, along with the positive changes to the descriptive and substantive representation of indigenous peoples caused by the movement, should have had a positive impact on the political participation of indigenous peoples (Madrid and Rhodes-Purdy, 2016; Yashar, 1999; Banducci et al., 2004).

Therefore, these two global processes, and the theoretical and logical consequences of each, appear at odds with one another. While one should have had the effect of depressing and/or limiting political participation among indigenous peoples, the other may have had the opposite

effect of expanding political opportunities and stimulating participation among the same groups. Of course, neither of these processes has occurred in isolation of the other, meaning that some the consequences of both can certainly be seen in every case. My question, then, is how have these processes specifically impacted levels of political participation of indigenous peoples, if at all? Is it possible to reach a conclusion that is true for most cases of indigenous political participation? In investigating these processes and political behaviors, I hope to find a point of intersection between these two processes to identify the way that indigenous peoples interact with their political systems today. In other words, I seek to understand the extent to which each of these processes has affected indigenous political engagement around the world, and if one has prevailed over the other in some way.

Taking a small step towards answering these questions, I conducted field research in Yucatán, Mexico, a state with a large indigenous population that has certainly experienced forms of political and socioeconomic oppression, and that has also seen the effects of indigenous mobilization. Using a combination of surveys and interviews conducted in the summer of 2018, I sought to gain insight into how the processes of oppression and mobilization have impacted the way(s) that Yucatán's indigenous peoples engage with their political system today. My research specifically aimed to address how indigenous peoples' political attitudes and participatory behavior differs, if at all, with those of their non-indigenous or *mestizo* counterparts. Before addressing the results of this research, I used the existing theories detailed in my literature review to develop two hypotheses: Hypothesis A, which is the hypothesis that I initially expected to be accurate, proposed that indigenous respondents would exhibit (1) more negative political sentiment and (2) lower levels of political participation when compared with non-indigenous respondents. Hypothesis B, however, proposed the alternative outcome that indigenous



respondents would exhibit equivalent levels of (1) political sentiment and (2) political participation when compared with their non-indigenous counterparts.

Upon examining the data from my surveys, it became clear that Hypothesis A was entirely untrue, and Hypothesis B's prediction was much closer to the actual results. The information provided by my surveys and interviews expressed that indigenous respondents participate just as much, and in some cases *more* than non-indigenous respondents. Similarly, political attitudes among both groups were more or less equivalent, though indigenous peoples did exhibit a significant preference for the local government over the federal government. Though I knew from the beginning that either hypothesis could have been true, I was nonetheless puzzled by these findings, as I had associated my own expectations with those of Hypothesis A. These results therefore led me to return to the literature to question why my initial hypothesis had been so far off the mark.

In digging a bit deeper into the *specialized* research on the politics of the state of Yucatán, my results began to make a lot of sense. And so, after exploring more of the secondary literature on the case of Yucatán, and after reexamining the results of my own study, I formulated a new and revised argument that synthesized my two initial hypotheses in a way that made sense for the global context, and that explained the anomaly of Yucatán: In most cases, the socioeconomic oppression and ethnic inequality experienced by indigenous peoples should translate to lower levels of political participation. However, the historical and political context of Yucatán provides a few unique characteristics that limit this connection, leading to higher levels of political participation in this specific case. These characteristics are as follows: first, though inequality is high in Yucatán as in all of Mexico, these socioeconomic inequalities do not always follow ethnic lines, making ethnic inequality less of a factor. Second, ethnicity is not a very

salient political issue in Yucatán compared to other parts of the world with a similar ethnic composition, making it a less divisive issue overall. Third, politicians and political parties—and specifically MORENA—have placed a greater emphasis on indigenous interests and rights in recent years, potentially increasing the political engagement of indigenous peoples. And finally, Yucatán is unique in that the social and cultural stigma against indigenous peoples is not as strong as in other parts of Mexico or in other countries, potentially impacting the willingness of indigenous peoples to be active in the state’s social and political spheres.

As one can see, this is not at all the conclusion that I predicted prior to conducting research and analyzing the data. I believe that this is in part because, after formulating my initial hypotheses, I read a *lot* more on the topic and my understanding of the peculiarities and complexities of indigenous political participation grew immensely. In learning more about the complexities of the issue, I became much more aware of the particularities between each case, and the simple fact that it may not necessarily be possible to generalize the political behavior of an entire and extremely diverse group of peoples into one set hypothesis or the other. I do still maintain that the processes of oppression and mobilization have been global ones, and that they have, to some extent, touched indigenous groups in all parts of the world (save for uncontacted indigenous tribes). No polity in our globalized world exists in a bubble, and global processes such as those that I’ve discussed profoundly impact the political and socioeconomic systems of all countries around the world. That being said, it is certainly important to acknowledge the diversity and cultural relativity of each situation.

Therefore, one of the most significant takeaways from this study is that each case, including that of Yucatán, has a unique geographic, historical, and political context, meaning that different indigenous groups in different parts of the world will have been affected by these

processes to different extents, and in distinct ways. I do hold the expectation that, in a majority of cases, indigenous peoples should exhibit lower levels of political participation. This is not meant to generalize the behavior of all indigenous peoples, but to provide a standard assumption based on the overwhelming literature that shows the socioeconomic and/or political oppression under which most indigenous peoples exist. This assumption is meant to be taken as an overarching trend, but also to encourage future scholars to understand the situational particularities of his/her case before reaching any conclusions.

Another notable implication of this revised argument is that it confirms many of the theories present in the existing literature. First, it confirms the importance of ethnic inequality, or a lack thereof, in determining political behavior. This proved to be a crucially important factor in the case of Yucatán, and has far-reaching implications for other states and countries around the world, since it implies that participatory inequality may be higher where ethnic inequality is lower, and vice versa. Another important implication from this study is related to the saliency of ethnic divisions, and how this too may influence the political behavior of members between different ethnic groups. Additionally, this study makes an argument in favor of the power of substantive representation on influencing political behavior. Though some of the existing literature makes connections between *descriptive* representation and political participation (Madrid & Rhodes-Purdy, 2016; Banducci et al., 2004), this research suggests that this isn't always necessary to stimulate participation among oppressed groups. Instead, enacting substantive policy changes and electing the political parties that reflect the interests of otherwise underrepresented groups can have the similar effect of encouraging participation in positive political activities. This has far-reaching implications for the political representation of minorities in any democracy.

One more important implication that comes from this research is that low levels of discrimination may have a positive effect on the political participation of oppressed or marginalized groups. Lower levels of discrimination is unique to Yucatán and, as the LAPOP data show, to states with large indigenous majorities. However, this connection certainly has implications for societies around the world in which discrimination against an already marginalized is particularly low or high. For example, a region of another country in Latin America where ethnic inequality happens to be relatively low may exhibit results similar to those found in Yucatán.

Though I am confident in the results, argument, and subsequent implications of this research, it is by no means a complete study and has a few limitations that may have impacted the outcome. One element of the study that may have influenced the results is that the field research was conducted during the height of a major election cycle in Mexico. I conducted the bulk of my field research during May and June of 2018; correspondingly, Mexico held hundreds of local and national elections, including a presidential election, in early July. This is significant not only because it was a particularly politically active time for the whole country, but also because lower-class and indigenous peoples throughout the state were especially energized and eager about the elections. This is in part due to the fact that Andrés Manuel López Obrador won in a landslide victory, with his party also taking up over a third of the seats in the Mexican Congress. The significance of this election, therefore, may be reflected in my data through higher levels of political participation across the board, more critical attitudes towards the sitting presidential administration, or a more positive energy overall towards the government. Rather than view this specific political context as a hindrance to my study, however, I tried to take

advantage of the unique political atmosphere and pose questions (especially in my interviews) that were directly related to the rise of MORENA and the upcoming elections.

Another limitation of my surveys, which I discussed in Chapter 3, is that the sample population was not perfectly random, and may have been disproportionately representative of a middle to higher socioeconomic class. However, I attempted to reduce the extent to which this affected my results by conducting surveys in a variety of settings to expand the breadth of my sample. Additionally, in order to ensure the validity of my surveys in light of these and other limitations, I compared my results with those from public data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)'s 2014 round of surveys in Mexico. These data largely confirmed many of the findings from my own surveys, and provide a greater sense of legitimacy and validity to the results and conclusions gathered from my own research.

Taking into consideration the results, implications, and limitations of this study, there are many ways to move forward with future research on the topic of indigenous political participation and its connection to the global indigenous movement. One way to expand this research would be to conduct similar studies in other states in Mexico with an indigenous majority; some ideal options would be Quintana Roo, Campeche, Chiapas, or Oaxaca. Expanding the research in this way would make it possible to investigate the extent to which the trends identified in Yucatán are reflective of other cases, and the extent to which my argument applies to the cases of other states with similar backgrounds. I view that the best way to progress with this research would be to expand the study in this way to other states throughout Mexico, and then ultimately to other countries with large indigenous populations.

A way to make this study more comprehensive would be to incorporate more of a focus on how indigenous peoples participate in politics at a community level, or within self-

autonomous territories. One element of the topic of indigenous politics that only became clear to me once I was quite a bit along in the study is that, in a survey such as the one that I designed, it is extremely difficult to discern the extent to which indigenous peoples participate in politics at an official state level versus at a local and/or community level. This is something that I wish I had the chance to explore and make more clear, and something that future scholars should make an effort to do in their studies. It is also quite difficult to measure political participation in indigenous communities that are self-autonomous, because the members of those communities are essentially citizens of two separate polities simultaneously. Existing research from the case of Oaxaca, Mexico, also suggests that those in self-autonomous communities are less likely to participate in politics at the official, state level (Hiskey & Goodman, 2011). Fortunately for my study, there are no officially self-autonomous indigenous communities in the state of Yucatán, so this was not a factor for my research. However, it is an added complexity to the issue that must be taken into account for any research on indigenous political participation elsewhere.

This study on the political participation of indigenous peoples in the state of Yucatán attempts to provide a deeper understanding of the ways that Mexico's most marginalized ethnic groups participate in the state's politics, and how this connects to the global processes of oppression and mobilization. Through this research, I aspired to find a point of intersection between these global processes, and identify how the existing theories regarding indigenous peoples and political participation prove true for today's politics. Though my initial expectation (Hypothesis A) was ultimately found to be null in the case of Yucatán, through this study new and unexpected trends were discovered, and broader potential implications formed. As in any good research study, this one answered a few questions, yet uncovered countless more that are to be explored in the future. Therefore, while this study is a significant one, it is by no means

complete—this research marks just the beginning of a deeper understanding of these global processes, and how they have contributed to the nature of indigenous political engagement today.

## Appendix A: Survey

Mi nombre es Kristen Gugerli, y soy estudiante de la Universidad de Pittsburgh en la ciudad de Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (EE. UU.). Yo hago esta encuesta como parte de un proyecto de investigación para mi licenciatura en Estudios Internacionales en la Universidad de Pittsburgh. En esta investigación estoy estudiando el sentimiento político y los niveles de participación política en países con grandes poblaciones indígenas. Completar esta encuesta no debe tomar más de 15 minutos. Es COMPLETAMENTE ANÓNIMA. Esto significa que Ud. no tiene que dar su nombre o alguna información personal—solo sus respuestas verdaderas a las preguntas de abajo. Si Ud. tiene alguna pregunta o duda sobre la participación en este estudio, o si tiene interés en aprender más sobre las conclusiones de este estudio, puede enviarme un email a [ksg30@pitt.edu](mailto:ksg30@pitt.edu). Si Ud. está de acuerdo con estas condiciones, y tiene al menos 18 años, por favor sigue con la encuesta.

1. Escoja su género:

☐ Hombre

☐ Mujer

2. Escoja el grupo de edad al que usted pertenece:

☐ 18-24

☐ 25-35

☐ 36-50

☐ 51-74

☐ 75+

3. ¿En cuál de las siguientes categorías usted pertenece? (Escoja todas las que apliquen)

☐ Blanco/Caucásico

☐ Otomí

☐ Indígena

☐ Nahua

☐ Mestizo

☐ Totonaca

☐ Maya

☐ Asiático

☐ Afro-mexicano

☐ Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Mulato

☐ No sé

☐ Mixteco

☐ No quiero responder.

☐ Zapoteco

4. ¿Cuál(es) idioma(s) habla Ud. con fluidez? (Escoja todas las que apliquen)

☐ Español/Castellano

☐ Mixteco

☐ Maya Yucateco

☐ Inglés

☐ Náhuatl

☐ Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

5. ¿Cuál es su lengua nativa<sup>14</sup>?

☐ Español/Castellano

☐ Mixteco

☐ Maya Yucateco

☐ Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Náhuatl

6. ¿En cuáles de las siguientes actividades políticas participó Ud. en los últimos 2 años?

(Escoja todas las que apliquen)

☐ Votar

☐ Asistir manifestaciones

☐ Presentar una petición

☐ Ser voluntario para una campaña para un partido político

☐ Participar en grupos interesados<sup>15</sup> o sindicatos

☐ Leer/escuchar las noticias políticas

☐ Postularse un cargo político

☐ Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>14</sup> 'Lengua nativa' (o lengua natural, idioma materno): el primer idioma que aprende una persona, o el idioma con que crecía una persona

<sup>15</sup> 'Grupos interesados': grupos de personas con intereses similares, típicamente con la intención influir las políticas



7. ¿En cuál de las siguientes declaraciones se incluye Ud.?
- ☐ Estoy muy informado/a sobre las noticias políticas de México.
  - ☐ Estoy un tanto informado/a sobre las noticias políticas de México.
  - ☐ Estoy poco informado/a sobre las noticias políticas de México.
  - ☐ No estoy muy informado/a sobre las noticias políticas de México.
  - ☐ No estoy informado/a en absoluto sobre las noticias políticas de México.
8. ¿Votó Ud. en las elecciones presidenciales más recientes (2012)?
- ☐ Sí
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ No recuerdo
9. Si su respuesta es sí, ¿por quién votó Ud. en las elecciones presidenciales más recientes (2012)? (Si Ud. respondió 'No' a la pregunta 8, omita esta pregunta.)
- ☐ Enrique Peña Nieto
  - ☐ Andrés Manuel López Obrador
  - ☐ Josefina Vázquez Mota
  - ☐ Gabriel Quadri de la Torre
  - ☐ Otro: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ No recuerdo
10. ¿Planea Ud. votar por un candidato presidencial este año (2018)?
- ☐ Sí
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ No sé.
  - ☐ No quiero decir.
11. Si su respuesta es sí, ¿por quién planea Ud. votar en las elecciones presidenciales este año (2018)? (Si Ud. respondió 'No' a la pregunta 10, omita esta pregunta.)
- ☐ Andrés Manuel López Obrador (MORENA)
  - ☐ Ricardo Anaya (PAN)
  - ☐ José Antonio Meade (PRI)
  - ☐ Jaime Rodríguez (Independiente)
  - ☐ Otro: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ No sé.
  - ☐ No quiero decir.
12. ¿Cómo calificaría Ud. al presidente Enrique Peña Nieto en una escala del 1 al 10? (1 es muy malo, 5 es neutro, 10 es muy bueno)
- 1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      No sé.
13. ¿Cómo calificaría Ud. a la alcaldesa Alpha Alejandra Tavera Escalante (MORENA) en una escala del 1 al 10? (1 es muy mala, 5 es neutra, 10 es muy buena)
- 1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      No sé.

14. Si tuviera Ud. \$100 pesos para gastar en el gobierno, ¿cómo lo gastaría Ud.?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> La economía/trabajos | <input type="checkbox"/> Derechos Humanos       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anticorrupción       | <input type="checkbox"/> Iniciativas antidrogas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> El medio ambiente    | <input type="checkbox"/> Expandir el ejército   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> La educación         | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____            |

15. ¿Cómo piensa Ud. el gobierno gasta la mayoría de su dinero?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> La economía/trabajos | <input type="checkbox"/> Derechos Humanos       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anticorrupción       | <input type="checkbox"/> Iniciativas antidrogas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> El medio ambiente    | <input type="checkbox"/> Expandir el ejército   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> La educación         | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____            |

16. Si pudiera Ud. escoger una cosa en que el gobierno debe enfocarse MÁS, ¿qué sería?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> La economía/trabajos | <input type="checkbox"/> Derechos Humanos       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anticorrupción       | <input type="checkbox"/> Iniciativas antidrogas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> El medio ambiente    | <input type="checkbox"/> Expandir el ejército   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> La educación         | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____            |

17. Si pudiera Ud. escoger una cosa en que el gobierno debe enfocarse MENOS, ¿qué sería?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> La economía/trabajos | <input type="checkbox"/> Derechos Humanos       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anticorrupción       | <input type="checkbox"/> Iniciativas antidrogas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> El medio ambiente    | <input type="checkbox"/> Expandir el ejército   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> La educación         | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____            |

Para las siguientes preguntas, rodea la respuesta que se describe Ud. en una escala de 1 a 5.

| 1: Estoy muy de acuerdo | 2: Estoy algo de acuerdo | 3: Estoy ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo | 4: Estoy algo en desacuerdo | 5: Estoy muy en desacuerdo |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|

18. Mi gobierno federal<sup>16</sup> es eficaz.

1            2            3            4            5

19. Mi gobierno local<sup>17</sup> es eficaz.

1            2            3            4            5

20. Mi gobierno federal representa a mí y a mis intereses.

1            2            3            4            5

21. Mi gobierno local representa a mí y a mis intereses.

1            2            3            4            5

22. El gobierno federal intenta luchar contra la discriminación hacia los indígenas en México.

1            2            3            4            5

23. El gobierno local intenta luchar contra la discriminación hacia los indígenas en Yucatán.

1            2            3            4            5

<sup>16</sup> ‘Gobierno federal’ refiere al nivel más alta del estado de México (ej. el presidente, el congreso nacional)

<sup>17</sup> ‘Gobierno local’ refiere al nivel más baja del gobierno mexicano (ej. los representantes locales, alcaldes, líderes locales o tribales)

24. El gobierno mexicano (federal y local) respeta a los derechos y necesidades de los indígenas tanto como los derechos y necesidades de todos los otros ciudadanos.

1            2            3            4            5

25. Mi gobierno prioriza el bienestar de su gente.

1            2            3            4            5

26. En 2018, la Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI) colaboró con el gobierno del estado de Yucatán para proveer estructuras/edificios, servicios públicos, agua potable, electricidad, y servicios de comunicación a más de 3,700 habitantes de pobres comunidades Mayas. En esta escala, ¿en qué medida apoya Ud. esta iniciativa?

- ☐ Estoy totalmente de acuerdo con esta iniciativa.
- ☐ Estoy de acuerdo con esta iniciativa.
- ☐ Estoy ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo con esta iniciativa.
- ☐ No estoy de acuerdo con esta iniciativa.

*Muchas gracias por su tiempo y participación. Por favor envíeme un correo [ksg30@pitt.edu](mailto:ksg30@pitt.edu) si tenga alguna duda o pregunta más sobre el proyecto.*

## **Appendix B: Discussion of Categorical Distinctions**

It is crucial to note that, though this study was conducted in the fields of Political Science and Global Studies, my thesis committee was comprised of academics from a variety of fields. In fact, the only member of my committee from the field of Political Science was my thesis advisor and committee chair, Dr. Scott Morgenstern. Dr. Paul Eiss, my external examiner from Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in Anthropology and History with a regional focus in the Yucatán. The remaining members of my committee were Dr. John Markoff, a sociologist, and Dr. Michel Gobat, a historian. Therefore, while I come from a Political Science background, my thesis was ultimately judged by scholars from various fields, making this thesis a truly interdisciplinary work. Additionally, because this thesis was judged from various academic perspectives, some members of my committee noted or critiqued some of the categorizations and/or distinctions that I make within my thesis, and asked for further clarification. For this reason, here I note some of the categorical distinctions that raised questions among my committee, and I attempt to provide some clarity.

### **B1 Positive vs. Negative participation**

In my thesis, I distinguish between two different types or categories of political participation, which I delineate and define as ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ political participation. The definitions of these types of participation changed over time as I found inherent problems in this dichotomy, and the members of my committee found problems in the way that I define ‘political participation’ generally. One of the most significant criticisms was that I only refer to political participation as it is defined in the field of Political Science, as a formal interaction with state institutions. Members of my committee with backgrounds in anthropological research took issue with this definition and with the binary between ‘positive’ and ‘negative,’ as they considered this

to omit a discussion of interactions that occur at a smaller, community level, that are indeed political, but may not be included within this Political Science definition. Therefore, considering this criticism as a true and legitimate one, I recognize that my definition of political participation, and my categorization of ‘positive’ versus ‘negative’ participation, is imperfect and incomplete, failing to recognize the validity or value of various other informal political activities that fall through the cracks of this distinction. However, it is a fact that these formal forms of political participation that are included in Political Science’s definition are more easily quantifiable—therefore, for the purpose of this study, I maintain this definition and distinction, though I recognize that it is incomplete and fails to address other important political activities.

## **B2 Substantive vs. Descriptive Representation**

Throughout this thesis, I repeatedly discuss levels of political representation in Mexico and around the world, and generally distinguish between two types of participation: ‘descriptive’ and ‘substantive.’ Descriptive representation is what most people generally consider when discussing political representation: this refers to the extent to which a country’s demographic makeup is directly reflected in political bodies, such as the legislature, judiciary, or executive. Therefore, when discussing a high level of descriptive representation of indigenous peoples, this signifies that there are a relatively high number/percentage of indigenous individuals in a country’s political bodies. ‘Substantive’ representation, on the other hand, refers not to representation based on demographic characteristics, but on the *interests* of a group. Therefore, if a group, such as indigenous peoples, is said to have a high level of substantive representation, this refers to the idea that their interests have been incorporated into the political sphere, and that their goals have been addressed to some extent politically—even if there are no indigenous individuals directly involved in the policymaking.

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