

Decolonizing the Nation-State

Indigenous Autonomy, Extractivism and Consultation in Bolivia

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Question

How effectively has indigenous autonomy been implemented, in the face of rigid economic and extractive practices?

Context

Since Evo Morales' ascent to presidency in 2005, Bolivia has enacted one of the world's most advanced models for indigenous rights. His adherence to indigenous autonomy is a significant feat after centuries of colonization and displacement.

Yet, years after a new constitution is enacted, indigenous peoples continue to mobilize for the full expression and granting of their collective rights.

Purpose

- Identify obstacles in the process of acquiring and practicing indigenous self-governance
- Analyze the discord between the model of autonomy, and the state's resource extraction on traditional lands
- Determine the success of consultation methods in reconciling the agency of communities and extractive industries
- Understand Bolivia's plurinationalism, and its constraints, in the context of an inherited economic framework

Indigenous Autonomy: Promises and Expectations

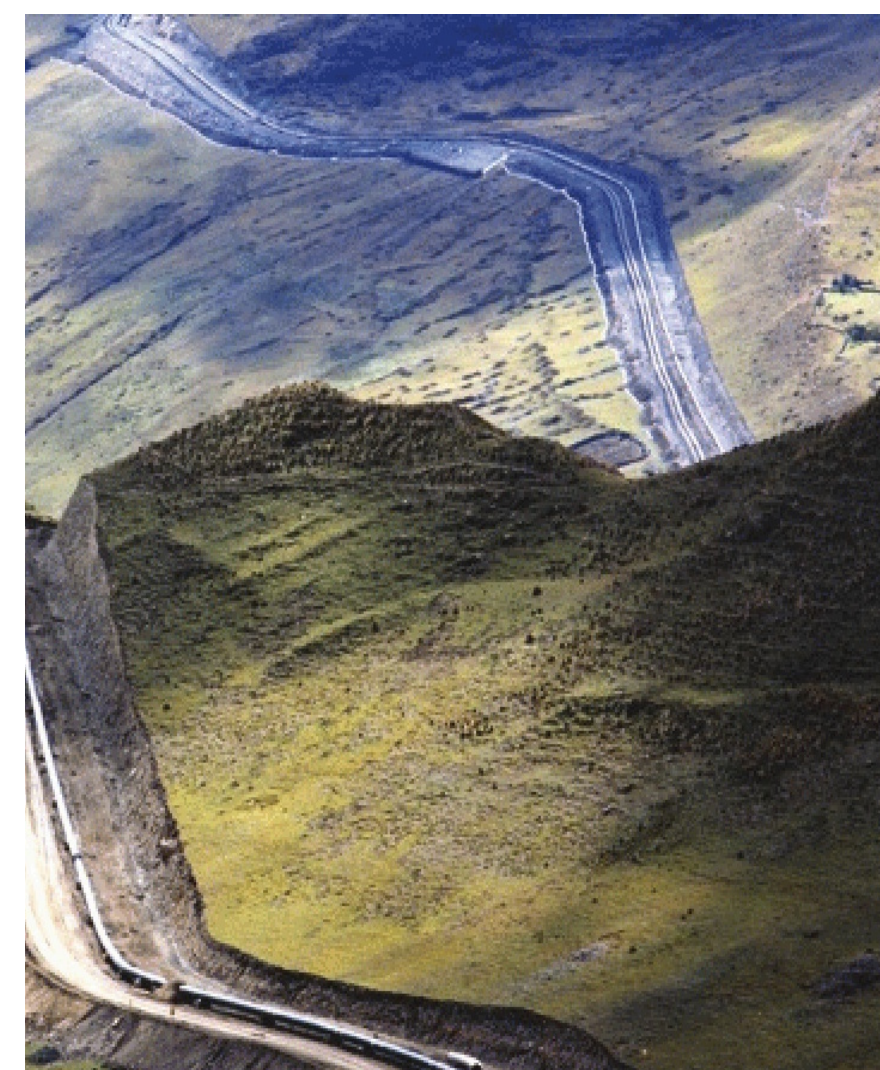
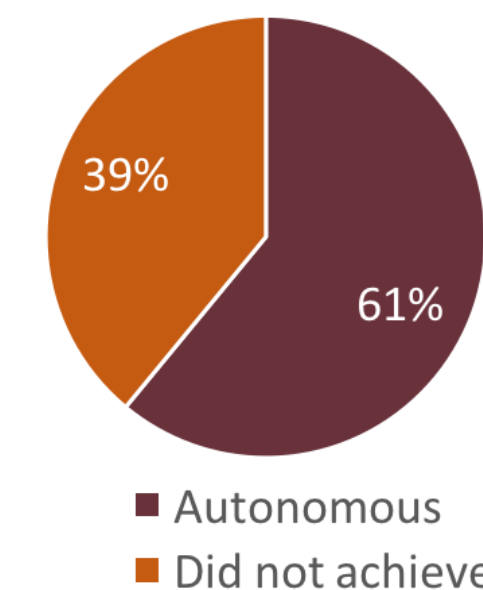
- The right to re-establish collective ownership over their traditional and ancestral territories, through a process based on self-determination
- The establishment of sovereign and place-based methods of governance, including local institutional and political administration, while remaining part of the Bolivian state
- Authority over legal and procedural frameworks in order to improve local social services and rural infrastructure

Method

The Process for Autonomy

- Entails municipal popular votes, to determine local interest in pursuing autonomy
- Requires a comprehensive application process, based on proof of precolonial occupation
- Largely dependent on the support of Non-Governmental Organizations to navigate the bureaucratic process

Communities initiating process for autonomy



Pipeline traversing indigenous highland territory, *Pipelines International (2011)*

Extractivism and Autonomy

- As part of the neo-extractivist model, a majority of social programs in Bolivia are funded by extractivism
- Bolivia's economy, and processes for wealth redistribution, are largely dependent on natural resources for domestic revenue
- When autonomy is achieved, the state retains control over all nonrenewable and subsurface resources on traditional territories

Consultation: Theory and Practice

- Indigenous communities are legally entitled to a free, prior, and informed consultation process, before the extraction of resources on their land.
- Consultation is mediated by government representatives from the Ministry of Hydrocarbons and Energy
- Communities are required to seek their own sources of expert knowledge, which will directly determine their effectiveness in consultation

Results

- The application process itself poses an obstacle to indigenous autonomy
- Persistent centralized control of resources and land
- Proposed consultation processes have proven inequitable; very little free, prior, and informed consent

TIPNIS

- Community: acquired autonomy in 2010
- In the same year, the Bolivian state proposed to erect a highway traversing the width of their territory
- No consultation was initiated by the state
- TIPNIS locals, and other indigenous groups and allies, staged a 600 km March to protest the creation of this highway



Map of TIPNIS autonomous territory, and the proposed road, *Página Siete (2012)*

Conclusions

- The models of indigenous autonomy and neo-extractivism are ultimately incompatible
- Neo-extractivism is unsustainable, but remains a pillar of the Bolivian economy
- Under these frameworks, plurinationalism is difficult to reconcile
- Democratic consultation, practiced in "good faith," is a promising method to mitigate conflicts and demands