Indigenous Peoples, Representation and Citizenship in Guatemalan Forestry

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Abstract

Forestry decision-making is still largely centralised in Guatemala. Nevertheless, elected municipal governments can now play a key role in local forest management. These local governments, with some exceptions, are the principal local institutions empowered to participate in natural resource authority. Some theorists argue that such elected local officials are the most likely to be representative and downwardly accountable. But do these political institutions have the ability to represent the interests of minority and historically excluded or oppressed groups? Latin American indigenous movements are fighting for new conceptions of democracy and practices of representation that recognise collective rights and respect for customary law and authority. How does this approach weigh against elected local government? This article compares how elected municipal governments versus traditional indigenous authorities represent the interests of indigenous communities in forest management. It traces the historical context of relations between indigenous people and the state in the region, and then presents the findings from case studies in two Guatemalan municipalities. The article finds that both authorities have some strengths as well as important weaknesses, thus supporting arguments for the reinvention of both liberal democracy and tradition in the interest of inclusive citizenship.

Keywords: representation, citizenship, Guatemala, indigenous peoples, multi-culturalism, forestry, recognition

INTRODUCTION

WHICH LOCAL INSTITUTIONS are chosen and recognised in the process of decentralisation (Ribot 2005)? What are the implications for local democracy? Some scholars argue that new institutions being created and supported under decentralisation are undermining representation and the emergence of democratic local government (Manor 2004; Ribot 2004; Ribot & Larson 2005). At the same time, powerful arguments are challenging Western ideals of democracy and its ability, as currently conceived, to represent the interests of groups that have been historically marginalised or excluded, such as indigenous peoples in Latin America (Van Cott 1994, 2000a, b; Yashar 1999).

This article analyses the dynamics of forestry decentralisation in two Guatemalan municipalities[1], both with populations that are over 90 per cent indigenous. Institutional choice in this context is among elected and 'other' non-elected local institutions. It is about the degree to which elected authorities fulfil their mandate to be repre-

sentative and accountable and the degree to which non-elected bodies can serve these same functions. In the Guatemalan case, the National Institute of Forests (INAB) has chosen to work through municipal governments, helping establish municipal forestry offices in a third of the nation's municipalities. To some extent, however, the municipal forestry offices act as deconcentrated offices of the INAB with little discretionary power. They carry out responsibilities delegated by the INAB and serve as intermediaries among the INAB, municipal governments and local residents. Nevertheless, in part because they are hired and supervised by the municipal government, some municipal forestry offices have responded to local demands in important ways.

One of the municipalities analysed here is seen by the INAB as having a particularly 'successful' forestry office. The other is a municipality in which the INAB has been unable to establish a local forestry office due to the opposition of a local traditional authority, which somewhat forcibly took control over the forest sector, and has

refused to allow the INAB to work there. These sharply contrasting cases are used to interrogate the implications of institutional choice and of municipal versus traditional authority specifically, in light of indigenous demands for representation, citizenship and the respect for collective and individual rights.

Questions, Hypotheses and Methods

What are local priorities with regard to forests among indigenous people, and to what extent do elected municipal versus traditional authorities represent or respond to their interests? Some scholars and practitioners assume municipal authorities to be more likely to be representative, because elections (and other oversight applied to local government) open greater potential space for downward accountability and active citizenship. Other scholars and practitioners expect indigenous authorities to better understand and speak for the demands of indigenous people, and see them as an important interlocutor with the state. The research presented in this article finds no simple answer; rather, both hypotheses are valid. Using two case studies, this article analyses current debates on institutional choice and recognition as they affect representation and citizenship.

The article argues that it may not be possible for political parties and local governments that form part of a state that has historically repressed the indigenous population to unproblematically become representative of and accountable to that same population. Critiquing *which* institution the central government recognises may be less important than examining the processes by which indigenous peoples seek representation and perform citizenship through *both* types of institutions. In the two cases discussed in this paper, indigenous peoples engage actively with both municipal and indigenous authorities, but in different ways, under different circumstances, and with different results.

The background research for this study is based upon the review of existing publications [including non-governmental organisation (NGO) studies, municipal development plans and forest policies] and recent historical documents on Guatemala, as well as extensive interviews, primarily in the capital, over a period of 3 years. The field research, discussed in the empirical section, involved two visits to the departmental capital of Quiché and two week long visits to the field sites with a research assistant, in January 2005. About thirty in-depth interviews were conducted in each, with municipal, indigenous, NGO and national government officials, as well as with a variety of rural community leaders.[2]

Outline of the Article

This article is organised into five sections including this introduction. The next section addresses theoretical questions regarding democracy, with particular emphasis on Latin American indigenous history and movements. The third section examines forestry decentralisation in Guatemala and presents the two case studies. This is followed by a discussion and analysis of representation and citizenship based on the findings, and finally a short conclusion.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN LATIN AMERICAN CONTEXT

'Institutional choice' refers to the entities chosen by governments to receive powers under decentralisation and, most importantly, to the political, ideological and theoretical positions underlying that choice (Ribot 2005). The 'recognition' of a particular local institution in turn confers power and legitimacy and 'has multiple effects that can shape democratic inclusion' and forms of belonging (Ribot 2005: 15). Following this logic, the recognition of downwardly accountable institutions, usually locally elected governments, will deepen inclusive democracy and citizenship, whereas the recognition of other parallel institutions such as traditional authorities, NGOs or stakeholder committees may undermine elected authority (Manor 2004) and create opportunities for elite capture (Ribot 2004).

In contrast, other theorists celebrate pluralism, which could be described for the purposes of this discussion as the recognition of numerous local institutions, as a good in and of itself (Wollenberg et al. 2005), in that it acknowledges diversity and the importance of debate and negotiation. Many at least identify an important role for civil society organisations in the construction of democracy (Fox 2004; Larson 2004). The articles in this volume provide contradictory evidence on the role of social movements or community organisations and their relation to local government. These studies suggest the importance of history and context to understanding the conditions under which the choice of certain institutions leads to more inclusive outcomes.

Local Democracy in Historical Context

Any discussion of institutional choice in Latin America must be based on an analysis of the needs and demands of the region's indigenous movements and an understanding of the historical relations between these populations and the state. Since the 1990s in particular, these movements have made powerful arguments for the transformation of the region's democracies in radical ways, based on an expanded conception of citizenship and the construction of pluricultural and multi-ethnic states (Van Cott 2000a, b). They argue for a pluralist democracy that includes not only respect for individuals and their ideas but also for collective identities based on socio-cultural differences (Ticona Alejo 2000). The discussion here touches on a

series of five points of important historical and cultural significance for the region, before going on to discuss debates regarding customary authority.

The first point of debate is the myth of the *mestizo* nation-state and the history of *indigenismo*[3] as the state sanctioned policy to assimilate and destroy indigenous populations. Virtually all Latin American constitutions failed to recognise, until very recently, that their populations are not, in fact, *mestizo*, or uniformly of mixed race and culture: 'children of a mythical European father and Indian mother' (Van Cott 1994: 3). Throughout Latin America, from countries with populations that are 1 per cent indigenous to those that are over 50 per cent, the myth that the original inhabitants have disappeared has been perpetuated by the dominant, if not majority, non-indigenous leaders.

This policy of exclusion is rooted in the colonial period, which established 'a rigid race-based class hierarchy' and the construction of nation-states through the 'conquest, domination and exploitation of indigenous peoples' (Van Cott 2000a: 2). Indigenous policies under independence evolved from annihilation, to forced removal to reservations, and, finally, to *indigenismo*, which was broadly adopted by 1940 and is still predominant in laws enacted as recently as the 1980s aiming 'to transform Indians into undifferentiated citizens' (Van Cott 1994: 260). Inclusion, citizenship and class mobility, then, required assimilation, and those who chose to maintain their indigenous identity remain excluded (Eckstein & Wickham-Crowley 2003).

Indigenismo is based on a racist ideology of guardianship or tutelage, the protection of Indian welfare and paternalism, with education as a tool for cultural assimilation and the defence of culture as folklore (Tresierra 1994). Tresierra (1994) traces indigenist principles through the history of the Mexican state, identifying different configurations of accommodation and policy but always with the same fundamental philosophy, even with the rise of 'participatory *indigenismo*' in the 1980s and 1990s. He argues that the primary goal of the state is to gain access to Indians' lands and natural resources. When indigenist strategies fail, the state's recourse has regularly been to turn to violence and repression.

This violence was particularly brutal under Guatemala's military governments in the second half of the last century (Adams 1994). Hundreds of indigenous communities were annihilated during the war that ended with peace accords in 1996, by an army that sought 'to reinvent the Maya … as a people bereft of history, of memory, and above all of agency in their own affairs' (Maybury-Lewis 2002: xvi).

A second important point of debate is the growing recognition that the regions' democracies are not, in fact, consolidated, due to the failure of the liberal democratic model—based on notions of individual universal values—to protect the rights of indigenous individuals. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, many Latin American countries returned to democratic rule after a period of authoritarian regimes, by instituting formal structures of democracy, such as elections and the right to organise. In parallel to this democratic opening, economic liberalisation and structural adjustment policies (SAPs) were also implemented (Yashar 1998). The resulting distribution of income and wealth in Latin America remains highly skewed, with SAPs only deepening existing inequities (Eckstein & Wickham-Crowley 2003).

Van Cott (2000a) argues that democratic consolidation thus faces two fundamental challenges: the legitimacy of a political system theoretically based on equality but with worsening economic conditions, and the gap between formal rights and the effective practice of citizenship, particularly for the poor. In Latin America, the configuration of new democracies occurred in a context of weak rule of law, weakening states and strengthening rural elites, resulting in states that serve 'private interests rather than the public good' (Van Cott 2000a: 5). Under these conditions, neither the political, civil or socio-economic dimensions of citizenship (Marshall 1963) are guaranteed, in practice, for groups that have traditionally suffered discrimination. Even in countries where civil rights have improved substantially, permitting safe spaces for the rise of indigenous movements today, political spaces are still substantially blocked while economic conditions worsen.

Liberal democracies based on universal individual rights may claim to represent all people equally but in practice 'privilege certain dominant voices over others' (Yashar 1999: fn. 32). In the context of state repression, violence and policies of assimilation, it is no surprise that indigenous people fail to believe that such discourse, or even its institutionalisation in national law, will guarantee and protect *their* individual rights. Hence, indigenous movements are challenging the liberal notion that the individual be the only unit of representation, demanding instead that 'the state simultaneously protect members' individual civil and political rights *and* recognise indigenous communities as a political unit' (Yashar 1999: 92, emphasis in original). In a sense, guaranteeing collective rights provides a legal basis for fighting assimilation, which in practice had been the only avenue for indigenous people to gain equal citizenship.

A third critical element is the powerful challenge to the liberal democratic model implicit in demands for indigenous self-determination, respect for indigenous territories and greater indigenous political participation. Indigenous movements are promoting multiple forms of citizenship and the formation of states based on diversity and pluralism (Jelin & Hershberg 1998) and the guarantee of national representation (Yashar 1998). The demand for autonomy is a collective political demand for a new pact between indigenous groups and the rest of society and the state (Diaz Polanco 1991). That is, very few in-

digenous groups in Latin America are demanding political sovereignty, but rather to be able to live according to their own socio-cultural traditions in the context of the nation-state and increase their political representation and participation in decisions that affect them (Field 1996; Yashar 1999; Perreault 2001), as well as to propose new forms of development such as 'development-with-identity' (Laurie et al. 2005). Autonomy and self-determination are conceived of as necessary for inclusive citizenship.

The fourth important element of history is the widespread lack of legitimacy and discrediting of political parties throughout Latin America and demands for alternative forms of representation. If the Latin American state protects elite interests, one of the key mechanisms through which this occurs is political parties. Seligson's (2004) study of democracy in ten Latin American countries found that political parties in all but one country were given the lowest score (35.5 on a scale of 100) on citizen confidence in comparison with seven other national institutions: Catholic church, police, armed forces, Supreme Court, election tribunal, municipal governments and Congress.

Numerous scholars speak of a generalised crisis of representation. Van Cott (2000a: 9) writes that 'Latin American politics is dominated by unrepresentative, oligarchic, personalistic parties with weak roots in society, which obstruct the access of popular groups and peripheral populations (in most countries, the majority of the population) to political decision-making spheres.' Social movements—not only indigenous—have thus aimed to strengthen citizen's rights and create alternative channels of access and representation to the state, though at the same time, the formation of indigenous political parties has sometimes been successful (Sieder 2002a).

Writing on Guatemala, Fonseca (2004: 139) argues that political parties are 'elitist, patrimonialist and majoritarian' and constitute a serious obstacle to democracy (for more on citizen perceptions of Guatemalan democracy, see Baviskar & Malone 2004). Nor are they in any way representative of Guatemalan society. For them, he argues, 'representation' means adopting the right moral, cultural and political language during election periods. A divided citizenry has been unable to challenge this and build alternatives. This is true in spite of the fact that Guatemalan law allows citizens to run for local office without being a member of a political party, if they are backed by a civic committee.

The challenges of entry into the political sphere, even at the municipal level in majority indigenous municipalities, provide a fifth important historical pattern. The Bolivian case best highlights the obstacles to participation faced by indigenous peoples. In 1994, important changes were incorporated into the new constitution. It established collective as well as individual citizens; recognised collective rights to self-government, special representa-tion and ethnic pluralism, along with individual rights; and made the uniform state more flexible to include a diversity of ethnic political structures (Van Cott 2000a, b). At the same time, the Law of Popular Participation was passed promoting decentralisation and structures for citizen participation in municipal decision-making, in particular recognising the role of traditional indigenous leaders and organisations and thus acknowledging this expression of collective identity (Postero 2004).

Nevertheless, the results were limited. Recognition, in this sense, was not enough, and democratic institutions still limited representation. Postero (2004: 203–204) argues that structural obstacles kept indigenous representatives out of local office while increasing the divisive role of political parties in community affairs. The law established a generic structure for municipal meetings based on western models that did not match the different forms of authority or representation of either the lowland or highland indigenous groups (see also Beneria-Surkin 2004). Even when indigenous people were able to participate, they were forced to work within prescribed agendas and processes, such that discussions centred on filling the requirements for access to funding rather than promoting debates about autonomy or cultural rights. Postero (2004: 204) concludes that 'the basic institutions of power, racism and traditional political parties had not been sufficiently challenged by the reforms'.

Despite widespread distrust of political parties, municipal governments and the reform process, decentralisation is largely seen as compatible with indigenous demands for autonomy and greater self-determination. There are cases in which it has clearly offered new points of entry into politics, new spaces for participation and new kinds of accountability (Yashar 1999; Sieder 2002a; Postero & Zamosc 2004). Some argue that it is a necessary but insufficient condition for indigenous representation (Warren 1998).

The Risks of the Customary

History clearly presents profound structural obstacles to the full political incorporation of indigenous peoples into the Latin American nation-state as it is currently conceived. It illustrates some of the demands and successes of a large and vibrant indigenous movement, and it demonstrates the 'power of indigenous rights—as a social movement and a critical discourse—to raise important issues for emerging democracies at this historical moment' (Warren 1998: 206). The fundamental democratic issue here is the balance of autonomy and inclusion (Sieder 2002b), of individual and collective rights, and the challenge of guaranteeing both 'in an ideologically meaningful, practically feasible, enduring way' (Yashar 1998: 39). This is not an unproblematic task. Numerous authors have raised concerns about the risks and limitations of customary authority and practices.

Traditional leadership is also almost always exclusive, even when it is not hereditary. In Zimbabwe, as in many other countries, 'traditional leadership is based on gender, seniority and caste [and is] conferred upon male elders of certain lineages' (Mapedza & Mandondo 2002: 12). Kassibo (2001, cited in Ribot 2004) found that traditional authorities were re-emerging as a reaction to the women's movement and to local democracy in Mali. Autonomous communities under traditional rule can lead to a detachment from national life and politics and limits to political pluralism within the community (Sánchez 1999), as well as persistent discrimination against women, the formation of fiefdoms with no outside checks on power, and the pressure to conform to tradition and hence limits to individual voice (Yashar 1999).

Mamdani (1996) argues that protecting 'the customary' protects people as a group but not individual rights. He argues that there is an opposition between the individual and the group, between civil society and community, between rights and tradition. The failure to enfranchise indigenous or ethnic groups, then, is a failure to protect their individual rights and to create the conditions necessary for the development of the citizen essential for a robust civil society. Nevertheless, this is precisely the dichotomy that indigenous movements and scholars in Latin America are seeking to overcome.

Democratic or undemocratic, liked or not, traditional leaders often have a certain degree of local legitimacy (Ntsebeza 2004). This legitimacy appears to be linked to two roles that they are likely to play. On the one hand, they may control the distribution of important resources that are necessary for local livelihoods. This is the case in many African countries where chiefs control land distribution or have been reinstated in such roles under recent 'decentralisation' policies (see, for example, Ntsebeza 2004). On the other hand, they may be seen as leaders who will protect communities or ethnic groups from outsiders. This role better reflects the Guatemalan indigenous authority presented in the following section. In light of this legitimacy, projects that simply exclude traditional authorities may fail (Oyono 2004). Wollenberg and Uluk (2004) found that gaining the village head's approval for a project gave it legitimacy and acceptability to villagers; the elite were gatekeepers for relations with outsiders, though they were not necessarily representative or downwardly accountable.

Sierra (1997) emphasises the need for internal debate within indigenous cultures and societies; 'reasonable appeals and dialogue should always be present, both within ethnic worlds and between ethnic peoples and national society' (de la Peña 2002: 148). Benhabib (2002: ix) proposes a 'deliberative democratic model that permits maximum cultural contestation in the public sphere, in and through the institutions of civil society'. The goal is not to preserve cultures, she argues, but to expand inclusion. Similarly, identity should not be about returning to a mythical past but rather its reinvention in the present (Hall 1990).

FORESTRY DECENTRALISATION
IN GUATEMALA

Guatemala is an exceptionally ecologically rich country. According to the Environmental Profile of Guatemala (IARNA/URL/IIA 2006), it contains fourteen Holdridge Life Zones; and the northern Mesoamerican land area constituted by Guatemala, Belize and Mexico, an area comprising less than 0.5 per cent of the earth's land surface, is home to 17 per cent of all known terrestrial species and holds second place in a list of the twenty-five regions of the world with the greatest number of species and endemism. At the same time this highly diverse natural wealth has been subject to rapid deterioration, due in part to a development model that has earned the country a place among lower middle-income nations based on a highly skewed distribution of income and land, and to the nature of the institutions behind that model (see Table 1).

Over the past 50 years, Guatemala's political culture has been shaped by the militarisation of society, violence, terror and authoritarianism. The return to a civilian president in 1986 was interrupted again by war in the early 1990s, with renewed guerrilla attacks as well as new state sponsored assassinations, death threats and disappearances. Peace accords were officially signed in 1996. Three important decentralisation laws, discussed below, were passed in 2002, adopting important aspects of the accords. Some scholars argue, however, that they fail to address the problem that 'many rural Maya distrust their local government officials as much as the state bureaucracy' (Fischer 2004: 97).

Table 1
Guatemalan economic, social and ecological statistics

Indicator	Quantity
Population *	12.6 million
GDP/capital **	$3505.00
Poverty **	57%
Extreme poverty	21.5%
Languages #	24 total: 21 Mayan, xinca, garifuna and Spanish
Forest cover ##	37.26%
Broadleaf forest	28.98%
Coniferous forest	2.29%
Mixed	5.80%
Mangrove	0.19%
Protected areas ##	164
Area	3,371,417 ha
Per cent	31%

*INE 2003
**United Nations Human Development Report 2004, cited in IARNA/URL/IIA (2006)
#Ortiz Gomez, F. (n.d.)
IARNA/URL/IIA (2006)

Like the state in general, forest management has also been highly centralised, and by law, forestry decision-making still is. The formal decentralisation process began in 1998 with the Forestry Institute's Project for the Strengthening of Municipal and Communal Forests (Boscom), as well as numerous related projects supported by NGOs.[4] Boscom works with local governments to set up municipal forest offices (OFMs), with 116 established as of mid-2005 out of a total of about 330 municipalities (Larson & Barrios 2006). The Forestry Law (101-96) specifically states that municipal governments should support the INAB in fulfilling its functions and be spokespersons for the policies and programmes 'INAB designs for their municipality' (Article 8), but pressure for more substantive decentralisation has increased over time.

As in most countries, there are many goals behind decentralisation. Decentralisation was promoted in the peace accords as an important process for building citizen participation. For the INAB, however, the original priority in establishing municipal forestry offices was simply to facilitate its own work. Increasingly, however, another goal (for the INAB and the private sector in particular) has been to promote support for forest management—the recognition that forests can be logged without deforestation—in light of conservationist and indigenous objections to logging.

All municipal governments have a right to 50 per cent of the tax income from forest licenses and can log or participate in incentive programmes on municipal lands. Beyond this, the Decentralization Law (Art. 6) states that when 'each municipality deems it convenient, it will solicit its incorporation into the decentralisation process.' This involves establishing an OFM, which then usually takes partial or full charge of domestic permits (mainly for firewood use), chainsaw registration, control of illegal activities and of forest fires, and technical studies for the national reforestation incentive programme Pinfor (INAB-GTZ-DDM-SECONRAD 2004). Since transfers of responsibility are done on a case by case basis, however, the OFMs' role varies among municipalities.

Though these responsibilities are limited, transferred gradually at the discretion of the INAB and do not include many substantial decisions, in practice Guatemala has one of the most thorough-going forestry decentralisations in Latin America. This is in part because few other countries have a programme for training and developing municipal forestry capacities. It is also because, over time, the INAB has become one of the main central government institutions to interact on a regular basis—thus building state-society relations—with municipal governments and the rural (largely indigenous) population. Though the Forestry Law implies a deconcentrated, one-way relationship with municipal government offices, in practice a new set of demands have been brought into the national dialogue: the recognition of traditional rights and customary practices in natural resource management.

The formation of municipal forestry offices brought two particular pre-existing points of discord into the local arena. First, broad sectors of the indigenous population object to logging, due to cultural conceptions of nature and/or the lack of benefits for the communities logged. Second, many poor indigenous people strongly resent the legal requirement to obtain a permit for the domestic use of firewood (OFMs facilitate the implementation of this regulation, established by law in 1996).

The research sites, Chichicastenango and San Juan Cotzal, are located in the cool highland pine forests of the department of Quiche, in the Altiplano, a region with poverty levels of 75–90 per cent (World Bank 2003). The population of Chichicastenango is K'ich'e and Cotzal, Ixil. Agriculture, and particularly subsistence agriculture, is the central economic activity, though Chichicastenango is also a popular tourist destination and has a thriving urban commercial centre and craft sector. Quiche is recognised as one of the central arenas of armed conflict up until 1996, and its horrors had severe economic and social consequences. In Cotzal, most of the population relocated during the war, many were killed, and according to residents, those who have 'returned' are often not prior residents but their children and grandchildren.

The political party associated with the massacres of this period is the right-wing populist Guatemalan Revolutionary Front (FRG), the party of dictator General Rios Montt. The FRG drafted, often forcibly, indigenous people into local Civil Defence Patrols, training them to use brutal methods of repression against their neighbours. In both municipalities, however, the FRG had won the recent mayoral elections. To explain this apparent anomaly, many people with whom we spoke pointed out that the FRG is far better organised and funded than alternative political parties or civic committees and claimed that its candidates used highly questionable, if not illegal, tactics to gain support. In addition, indigenous voters have sometimes expressed the importance of 'voting for the winner' in order to avoid future conflict.[5]

The rest of this section discusses the politics of choice in decentralisation before moving to the case studies. These are presented first with regard to mechanisms of participation in general and then with regard to the local forest management authority specifically.

Politics of Choice

Guatemala's central government has not exclusively chosen municipal authorities as the official recipients of decentralised powers, but municipal governments are substantially 'recognised' in law and practice. Indeed, they receive 10 per cent of the national budget as well as other taxes, and municipal autonomy is recognised by the 1985 constitution and the 2002 decentralisation laws.

In addition to municipal governments, though, based on the peace accords, the Municipal Code (Decree 12-

2002) also recognises indigenous authorities. These include 'indigenous mayors,' an entity originally set up by the colonial government to oversee indigenous populations. Though only about eighteen still exist in the country (Tavico, *pers. comm.* 15 November 2004), indigenous mayors must be 'recognised, respected and promoted' where they still remain (Art. 55). The Municipal Code also orders municipal governments to consult with indigenous communities or their authorities regarding any affairs affecting their rights or interests (Art. 65).

The Decentralization Law (Decree 14-2002) defines decentralisation as the transfer of decision-making power to municipal authorities *and* to 'legally organised communities, with the participation of municipal governments' (Art. 2). The Law of Urban and Rural Development Councils (Decree 11-2002) establishes the official mechanism for community participation in local and municipal level decision-making: the Community Development Councils (COCODES), formed according to the 'principals, values, norms and procedures' of each community, and above these, Municipal Development Councils (COMUDES), are composed of the mayor and councillors, plus up to twenty representatives selected by the COCODES, as well as representatives of other public and civil society entities from the local arena.

For its part, the INAB stands out among central government institutions in Guatemala for its professionalism and independence. Importantly, the central government does not control a majority of the board of directors. In fact, one administration's attempt to take control of the institute for political gain, recognising its extensive reach into rural municipalities, failed in part because the board of directors voted against the government's position. The INAB's success at maintaining professionalism over politics, in a highly politicised country, helps explain its reticence in permitting municipal authorities (seen as political and party dominated) to participate in forestry decision-making. Nevertheless, the INAB has specifically chosen to work with municipal governments in promoting the decentralisation of forestry related responsibilities. As we will see below, the 'choice' of the *Auxiliatura Indígena* in Chichicastenango, then, does not represent the INAB's policy but rather the adamant refusal of the indigenous authority to allow the the INAB to help establish a municipal forestry office.

Mechanisms of Participation

Representation is discussed here with regard to citizens' relations with (1) elected municipal governments; and (2) the authority in charge of forestry. Neither in Chichicastenango nor in Cotzal do local leaders view municipal governments as representing their interests,[6] but they have been more successful in the former in pressing some citizens' demands; however, Cotzal's forestry office has offered important points of engagement where the elected authori-

ties do not. This section examines the former set of relations; the following section looks specifically at forestry.

In Chichicastenango, the formation of the COCODES after the 2002 law flowed easily from existing grassroots structures that had been developed with the support of local NGOs. Over a 5 year period, each canton had established a coordinating council for its myriad local committees. Second level coordinating bodies were formed by organising these eighty-two cantons into eight micro-regions. In 2000 both organisations were legally recognised by the municipal government, and in 2002, the presidents and vice-presidents of the coordinating bodies of each micro-region became community representatives to the Municipal Development Council. The local councils in each community officially became the COCODES.

The councils worked on municipal issues in coordination with the municipal planning office and other members of the Municipal Development Council (other NGOs and municipal officials). The mayor who participated in this process was an interim mayor who served for only 1 year after the elected mayor had been forced to leave office, prior to the next national election. The results were the published Municipal Development Plan 2003-13 and the municipal government's approval, more or less, of the 2004 investment budget proposed by the communities themselves. In particular, in an unprecedented event, each of the eighty-two communities received an equal portion of investment funds, $4375, to spend on projects previously submitted and approved by the municipal government. No organisation had previously tried to influence the municipal budget in this way.

The process, however, met opposition from municipal government, traditional political parties, some associations that preferred to work individually and former leaders of the Civil Defence Patrols (RUTA 2002). Though a few municipal officials were supportive, others accused 'civil society' of interfering with municipal autonomy. Ironically, some were clearly proud of having a municipal development plan but still highly suspicious of the participatory process. By early 2005, civil society organisations and municipal council members clearly had different agendas regarding meetings. There was no evidence, for example, that the council understood that civil society or COCODES representatives should participate in Municipal Development Council meetings. Several people told us that the current mayor had been trying to sideline the efforts of the COCODES, and they were not optimistic. 'People are still afraid to speak out' and will only do it in groups like the development council meetings, 'where they have the support of others' (interviews, January 2005).

The COCODES in Cotzal appear to be far less developed, though Cotzal also has a municipal development plan, and during certain periods that this was being generated, there appeared to be several important and possi-

bly even regular meetings between the local government and communities. Nevertheless, this was organised by outside donors who are no longer present. The formation of COCODES had been instigated by the local government with, according to accusations, apparent favouritism to supporters of the mayor's political party. According to the municipal government's planning office, the same kind of structures exist as in Chichicastenango. That is, there are COCODES at the community level, and the municipality is divided into eight micro-regions, whose representatives attend Municipal Development Council meetings. Nevertheless, municipal commission heads suggested that this model was not actually put into practice. Several stated that meetings were held 'when there was a reason to do so,' such as a problem or crisis that needed to be addressed; individuals named in interviews by the mayor's office as members of the environment commission stated they had not been aware of any meeting in months.

In general it appeared that COCODES existed only in a few communities, and members were often unclear what they were for. There were also no regular meetings between the municipal government and auxiliary mayors, who serve as community representatives to local government. Auxiliary mayors were only occasionally called to meetings, or simply approached government officials as needed regarding problems in their communities, as did other local leaders. In Chichicastenango, however, there were *weekly* meetings between the mayor, the indigenous authority and local leaders such as the auxiliary mayors. Table 2 provides a summary comparison of the two municipalities

Table 2
Comparison of key characteristics of Cotzal and Chichicastenango

	Cotzal	Chichicastenango
Indigenous population	Ixil, 90–95% of population	K'ich'e, 90–95% of population
Poverty levels	High	High
Population	Small and rural Approx. 21,000*	Larger and more urban Approx. 107,000 (2000 census)
Economy	Subsistence agriculture	Subsistence agriculture/ tourism (crafts, religious traditions)
Civil society	Relatively weak organisation	Relatively strong organisation
Nature of elected municipal authority	'Closed', no regular meetings with population	'Closed', though open at particular moment, and regular meetings with population
Forestry authority	Municipal government has acclaimed forestry office that works closely with the INAB	Traditional authority parallels municipal government and has rejected central government forest policy

*Health centre data cited in Municipalidad de San Juan Cotzal (2004).

Forest Management Authority

The municipal government of Cotzal formed an OFM at the initiative of the mayor (and by agreement with the INAB), because of what he perceived as problems of uncontrolled logging, forest fires and the need for environmental education in the municipality (Toma, *pers. comm.* 22 January 2005). Though formally accountable to the municipal government, the OFM has a close relationship with the INAB, which has its regional office a short distance away in Nebaj. In the specific context of the Ixil region, where there was very little logging prior to the entrance of the INAB, the INAB is seen as bringing in two 'evils': logging and the enforcement of burdensome rules for the poor.

In both municipalities, these objections are exacerbated by several other factors. Though the INAB promotes sustainable logging in principle, illegal activities account for up to half of all logging (Abdiel, *pers. comm.* 16 November 2004). It has also made mistakes, such as issuing logging permits based on titles that were later found to be contested. The INAB personnel are sometimes seen as 'arrogant', and they do not openly question laws seen by locals as unjust. Finally, there is little demonstrated desire on the part of the INAB's foresters to engage with indigenous traditions.

Cotzal's OFM was established in 2000 with support from the INAB's Boscom project, though it was fully funded by the municipal budget after 2 years. The OFM's primary objectives were to prevent forest fires and promote reforestation. It established a municipal tree nursery in town with some 25,000 seedlings, as well as smaller ones in a few communities. Ten hectares were under management for reforestation through the INAB's Pinfor incentive project; fourteen more were in the approval process. Fire brigades had been trained in several communities and educational campaigns had been done on the radio, mobile loudspeakers and in rural communities.

The OFM is in charge of authorising domestic use permits, though few people actually solicit them.[7] But rather than threatening people with fines for not getting a permit, the emphasis is on reforestation. The permits require that five seedlings be planted for each tree felled— unless there is effective natural regeneration—and people purchase these seedlings from the municipal nursery. Site inspections were only done for about fifteen of the thirty-five permits requested in 2004.

The OFM also organised the participatory development of a Municipal Forestry Plan, with over 180 people participating from the eight micro-regions. In that plan, the principal forestry problems were collectively identified and solutions proposed. One of the most important of these solutions was the recovery of the Mayan cosmovision. The specific meanings of this term vary, but for the community participants in Cotzal, this means cutting down a tree in accord with the phase of the moon, asking

nature for permission to cut trees and demonstrating 'spiritual respect for nature in thanks for the benefits it offers', among other things (Alcaldía Cotzal/Boscom n.d.).

The OFM, in some ways, serves as mediator between the INAB and the communities. Community residents see the INAB as 'the cop' who is trying to control them. The OFM officer facilitates, or softens, the INAB's entry into the municipality and talks to communities about logging, on the one hand, and the importance of reforesting, as well as the legal requirement to get a permit for firewood and tree felling, on the other. For the mayor, the OFM has been important in diminishing conflict by demonstrating to communities that the approved logging taking place in the area is both legal and responsible (Toma, *pers. comm.* 22 January 2005).

To the INAB, the OFM's primary role is to facilitate the INAB's ability to control both legal and illegal logging and decentralise services through someone who knows local customs (García, *pers. comm.* 19 January 2005). There is little recognition that the learning process could go both ways. In spite of the explicit discussion of the importance of recovering the Mayan cosmovision in the Municipal Forestry Plan, for example, the municipal forester stated that preserving Mayan traditions was not a part of his job.

The situation is very different in Chichicastenango. The INAB has not been able to establish a municipal forestry office due the intransigence of the indigenous mayor's office, known as the *Auxiliatura Indígena,* in spite of months of negotiation and the tentative agreement of municipal authorities. At one point, the INAB even proposed establishing the OFM in the Auxiliatura rather in the municipal government offices, but the offer was refused. In this case, the rejection of the INAB appears to go beyond the conflicts discussed earlier, to a fundamental contradiction regarding jurisdiction and power over natural resource management.

The indigenous mayor is primarily a religious and cultural authority with the goal of protecting local Mayan traditions. The office has no legal role in relation to government but maintains important local power and legitimacy. The mayor himself is fundamentally a Catholic religious leader in the context of the highly syncretic religious traditions of Chichicastenango, overseeing the coordination of the people and rituals of the *cofradías*. This mayor is selected by a group of male leaders known as *principales*. The election is for life, and the current leader, only recently selected at the time of this study, told us that 'you cannot say no'. It is a voluntary position that involves no remuneration. The Auxiliatura is an office established by the *principales* and which receives funding from the municipal budget to staff a full-time person. This is the authority that has argued for local control over forestry. The office is highly controversial, and complaints were directed there, not at the indigenous mayor specifically.

In addition to the real fear that logging will increase if the INAB is permitted to operate more fully in the municipality, indigenous leaders in Chichicastenango are challenging the INAB's conception of the forest as a source of income and its right to impose that conception in 'their municipality'. These indigenous authorities believe in conservation and in supporting and rebuilding the Mayan cosmovision. In 2001, the Auxiliatura assumed the issuance of domestic permits, on its own terms, based on informal agreements with the municipal government and the INAB. The INAB has continued to issue logging licenses in the municipality, over the indigenous authority's objections, though social pressure, as well as sometimes violent protests, has led people to reconsider making such requests.

The Auxiliatura limits domestic extraction to three loads of firewood and three standing trees every 6 months and requires the planting of two to five trees for every one felled.[8] The permit costs about $0.40. Permits are usually issued by the *principales* under the Auxiliatura's supervision. As in Cotzal, the primary message is that people should reforest. Nevertheless, there appears to be no site inspection, either before or after the permit is issued; there is no funding, legal authority, municipal forest policy or even a tree nursery.[9]

On the other hand, many people believe that deforestation would be rampant without the role played by the indigenous authority. Though there are numerous objections to the way in which it has managed its powers, including intransigence about working with the INAB or NGOs, 'manipulating people', 'lack of transparency' and 'failing to design an environmental or forest management policy', residents did not trust handing over forestry authority to the INAB or the municipal government. Rather, in interviews for this research, they advocated for a solution that fully included the traditional authority, as well as for the greater transparency and accountability of that authority. (Table 3 provides a summary of the forestry authority in the two municipalities.)

REPRESENTATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Elected municipal authorities in both Cotzal and Chichicastenango demonstrate important weaknesses with regard to representation. In both cases there were convincing accusations of doubtful practices to win voters, and in neither case are the resulting governments particularly open to communication or the participation of broad sectors of constituents in local decision-making. The apparent difference between the two municipalities is that Chichicastenango has relatively stronger civil society organisations that have constructed participatory structures over a period of several years, making it possible to make more effective demands.

As mentioned earlier, other researchers have pointed out the weakness of the democratic process in Guatemala

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Table 3
Characteristics of forestry authorities in Cotzal and Chichicastenango

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	Municipal forestry office Cotzal	**Traditional authority Chichicastenango**
Nature of authority	• office of the municipal government • represents the INAB's interests	• historic organisation of male, Catholic-Mayan leaders representing 'all indigenous' • hired staff has important powers
Accountability	• formally to municipal government • informally to population and the INAB	• to the *principales* (leaders) • to all members (all adult men)
Citizen participation	• in specific projects • in development of municipal forest strategy • environmental commission ineffective	• weekly meetings with community representatives • no formal relationship with broader local civil society organisation
Actions	• enforcing firewood permits • promoting environmental education, nurseries, reforestation, fire protection etc. • participatory development of municipal forest strategy but NOT responsive to specific indigenous vision	• enforcing firewood permits • slowing logging in municipality • keeping out the INAB • promoting Mayan cosmovision and demanding local control of resources, but without any concrete plan or strategy for what this would mean
The INAB's opinion	• one of best forestry offices	• intransigent and unclear motives
Civil society's opinion	• unaware of what it does, strategy not implemented • excellent opinion of those directly affected by its projects	• 'if it weren't there, forests would be devastated' • autocratic and unaccountable

(Fonseca 2004). The possibility of running non-party candidates should increase options for entry into the political sphere and thus improve local representation, but such a candidate ran in Cotzal and lost. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss Rios Montt's FRG further, but those who supported the civic committee candidate pointed out the difficulties of competing with a well organised and well funded party with national backing in a poor rural setting.

The comparison of the two municipalities highlights the importance of civil society in making representative democracy work, particularly when trust is low and elected governments are not accountable. Without organised demands Chichicastenango's COCODES would not have won the budget allocation for community projects. This experience also supports previous studies highlighting the need for both civil society organisation *and* openness of municipal government for the construction of local democracy (Fox 2004). Here, an interim mayor provided that opening.

In Cotzal the difference between the municipal government as a whole and the forestry office is quite striking. Though the government is basically seen as autocratic and having little communication with the population, the OFM is viewed quite favourably in the communities where it operates. This appears to be largely due to the personality of the head of the OFM office.

To what extent does the OFM represent local demands? OFM personnel have excellent relations with at least some rural communities and have played an important role in bridging the gap between local desires and the INAB's legal obligations. Being able to speak Ixil is particularly important. Clearly the domestic permit requirement is not imposed in an authoritarian manner, some community members have benefited from projects such as tree nurseries, and a few community members now have access to income from forestry incentives. Most importantly, the municipal forest policy was developed with important local participation and represents the interests of broad sectors of the rural indigenous population.

Nevertheless, it is notable that the OFM failed to recognise any role in supporting a priority solution proposed in the municipal forest policy: promoting the Mayan cosmovision. Also, outside of a few communities, local leaders in general, including those who work on environmental issues, knew little about the OFM's work. The head of the forestry office saw his job as fulfilling the INAB's orders and making them more palatable locally, but not as representing the interests of local people to the INAB. The participatory process that resulted in the municipal forest policy was not promoted by representative elected authorities but rather by mandate from Boscom. Still, local people have more influence on local forest policies than before.

In Chichicastenango the dispersion of authority was clearly recognised as a problem for the municipalities' forests. The lack of action on environmental concerns, though broadly expressed as a high priority, contrasts with the grassroots process for the use of municipal funds for development projects. In addition, the failure to identify a forestry authority that is legitimate both locally and for the INAB made it far more difficult to develop or implement *any* forest policy. In this vacuum, violent protests had occurred in response to isolated actions.[10]

The leaders of the civil society process that effectively engaged with the municipal government did not use their organisational capacity to try to influence the Auxiliatura. This suggests the need for formal accountability mechanisms to encourage or facilitate citizen engagement and indicates problems with the 'closed' nature of this traditional authority. Interestingly, however, no one interviewed suggested that excluding the indigenous authority was an optimal solution. This is in part because, in spite of its weaknesses, this authority comes much closer to articulating the interests of many indigenous people: openly defending the cultural value of forests and the Mayan cosmovision and opposing logging. On the other hand, the Auxiliatura did not propose any real policy beyond demanding local control and still enforced the domestic permit requirement, leading some detractors to question its motives and complain that it was 'just as bad as INAB.'

The process to formulate the municipal development plan and 2005 budget was an important example of democracy and citizenship at work, but the residents of Chichicastenango are still very far from feeling like citizens. Municipal government offices serve a formal purpose for required interactions with official authorities. In interactions with the state on sensitive issues, Guatemala's indigenous people feel highly vulnerable. The public domain has always been a place where the more powerful get their way. The state does not reaffirm their identity; the indigenous authority does. This is true even when elected mayors, or forestry office officials, are indigenous, because they are often more urban, wealthier, better educated and look down on indigenous traditions.

CONCLUSIONS

Guatemala's central government has largely chosen and recognised municipal governments as recipients of decentralised responsibilities. But in neither case study is the elected municipal authority representative or downwardly accountable, with the exception of one particular conjuncture in Chichicastenango when organised citizens were able to pressure an interim (and more open) mayor to respond to their demands. Political parties and the state in Guatemala have not represented the poor majority. Indeed, they have actively engaged in policies to annihilate and, in less violent moments, assimilate the indigenous population. Today, a complex and painful history impedes elected authorities from becoming trusted, representative and accountable entities.

Municipal governments have also received some new responsibilities—though limited decision-making powers—with the implementation of forestry decentralisation policies. In the case study municipalities of Cotzal and Chichicastenango, decentralisation resulted in greater enforcement of a domestic timber permitting requirement. In Cotzal, enforcement occurred through the formation of the forestry office, and in general there was greater imposition and acceptance of the forestry institute's rules and priorities than in Chichicastenango. There was also substantial grassroots participation in the formulation of a municipal forest policy, though it is unclear if and how that will be used. The municipal forester defended the interests of local communities in some minor ways that helped reduce conflict with the INAB.

In Chichicastenango, compliance with the domestic permitting requirement was established through negotiation with the indigenous authority, which opposed the INAB's agenda and right to intervene in the municipality. In contrast to the OFM in Cotzal, the Auxiliatura spoke out in defence of indigenous rights, opposing logging and promoting the Mayan cosmovision as a model for resource management. At the same time, however, the Auxiliatura failed to promote any kind of concrete strategy for resource conservation or management and, like the elected authorities in both municipalities, was not downwardly accountable.

Given the historical context, how can decentralisation best promote democratic local governance that takes the excluded sectors of the population into account? This study suggests that *which* institution is chosen and recognised may be less important than *how* each one is, or can be, used to support *processes* of representation, accountability and citizenship. With regard to forests and forestry, elected municipal officials, municipal forestry staff and the indigenous authority are all relevant to indigenous representation in the local sphere. Each demonstrates elements of success and failure in representation and accountability, and, in the historical context of Guatemala, none is sufficient on its own for building these.

What role did each of these institutions play in supporting processes to increase indigenous citizenship? Only municipal officials are elected by universal suffrage, and hence have some aspect of institutionalised broad-based downward accountability, but their accountability is limited by Guatemala's historical context. Chichicastenango's organised citizens were essential to making this institution work on their behalf, albeit temporarily. Though this was not enough to change the nature of the local municipal government institution more permanently, at the time of this study they were preparing to exert greater pressure on the newly elected government. Further research would be needed to ascertain the extent to which these actions resulted in further processes to build citizenship.

The municipal forester plays the role of intermediary among residents, the INAB and an otherwise largely unaccountable municipal government. Though his powers are limited, he was able to carve out a small space for negotiation that had not previously existed. Nevertheless, he did not see his role as representing or promoting local interests, nor did active citizens in Cotzal see this particular actor—in part because he has limited powers—as impor-

tant in building processes of representation or accountability.

In contrast to the two former institutions, the Auxiliatura avidly defends indigenous rights. It does not depend on the pressure of grassroots actors to do this but rather sees itself as a spokesperson for indigenous interests. Its relationship to its members is 'top down', however, and not accountable. Its actions could result in greater respect for indigenous rights and autonomous spaces, which may be a necessary—but insufficient—condition for building citizenship. It is notable that the grassroots organisations that lobbied the municipal government successfully did not even consider approaching the Auxiliatura with the demands (regarding the environment and natural resources) that they believe this authority should be addressing.

To be heard, poor and excluded or marginalised groups, such as Latin America's indigenous peoples, need organisations and collective action, allies, interlocutors and sympathetic, or at least open, government officials. Through these actors and institutions, their individual and collective concerns—whether organised around their sense of community and identity or around individual interests—can be translated into policy. They should not have to give up their identity—such as through assimilation—to be included. Rather, customs, traditional authorities and autonomy can help defend their right to inclusion.

Inclusion is not the *necessary* outcome, however, whether municipal or traditional authorities, or a combination of both, are recognised. Like the elected municipal authorities, the indigenous traditional authority studied here also has serious problems with transparency, representation and accountability. The struggle for democratic and responsive leadership is clearly necessary at all levels and in all spheres and will take time. The policy question then becomes how to support processes that make it possible to challenge structures of subordination wherever these exist: in political parties, elected governments and traditional authorities. This would include making it possible for citizens to organise without fear; assuring effective and accessible recourse mechanisms for those who are faced with threats or retribution, and promoting a climate of dialogue, reconciliation and respect for difference.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. In Latin America, 'municipal' government refers to the urban and surrounding rural jurisdiction, which may be substantial.
2. Given the short duration of the field visits, as well as the difficulties of doing research in this war-torn and highly conflictive area, the case studies were aimed as much to identify key questions as to find answers. The sites were chosen not to be representative but rather to highlight interesting exceptions.
3. Though 'indigenismo' often refers to this policy specifically, it is sometimes used with different meanings (see, for example, Ramos 1998).
4. This research focused on highland Guatemala and areas attended by the INAB. The National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) oversees forest management in parks, including the community forestry concessions of the Mayan Biosphere Reserve; space limitations make it impossible to discuss that institutional framework as well.
5. A former United Nations peace commission official reported that community members sometimes asked who was likely to win the elections so that they could vote accordingly (Trish O'Kane, *pers. comm.* 7 October 2004).
6. It is of course not possible to define a single set of 'indigenous interests'. With regard to forests, this study identified key points common to many poor, rural indigenous people—the rejection of the INAB's domestic permit requirement and of commercial logging—and/or to their leaders—reaffirmation of the Mayan cosmovision.
7. Legally, all permits outside the urban area must be signed by the INAB. The INAB gives them to the OFM for appropriate distribution.
8. Different sources (*principales*, the secretary of the Auxiliatura and CALAS 2003) report slight differences in details on this. Part of the reason is that natural regeneration is also considered acceptable, but in any case the rules are not strict and there is no inspection.
9. Though it was not possible to gather data, anecdotal evidence suggests that those who receive permits are not often reforesting.
10. The author's sources requested that we not provide details on these events.

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