

Amazonian Indigenous Participation in Electoral Processes in Peru. The Case of 2011, 2016, and 2021 Presidential Elections

Anuario Latinoamericano
Ciencias Políticas
y Relaciones Internacionales
vol. 13, 2022
pp. 45-76

DOI:10.17951/al.2022.13.45-76

La participación de los indígenas amazónicos en los procesos electorales en el Perú. El caso de las elecciones presidenciales de 2011, 2016 y 2021

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ABSTRACT

Through the analysis of the participation of the Amazonian indigenous peoples in the presidential elections of 2011, 2016, and 2021, this article illustrates how, two hundred years after Peru's political independence, they are still excluded from full-fledged citizenship. In the first part, it addresses the main obstacles to defining and measuring the indigenous vote, as well as the reasons that hinder adequate indigenous electoral participation. It then discusses the relationship between the Amazonian peoples and the national political parties, the experience of MIAP, and the formal restraints for the creation of an indigenous party. Finally, it analyzes the participation and electoral results in 22 districts located in the Peruvian Amazon region with a majority of the indigenous population. The data used comes from the Peruvian electoral institutions: the National Elections Jury (JNE), the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE), the official web portal Infogob of the JNE, and the National Censuses of 2007 and 2017. As part of an ongoing long-term research project, it includes data related to previous presidential elections as well as data from local and regional electoral processes. Moreover, it includes data from interviews with indigenous leaders and ethnographic observations.

KEYWORDS: *Peru, elections, Amazonia, indigenous peoples, electoral participation.*

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RESUMEN

A través del análisis de la participación de los pueblos indígenas amazónicos en las elecciones presidenciales de 2011, 2016 y 2021, este artículo ilustra cómo, doscientos años después de la independencia política del Perú, continúan siendo excluidos de una ciudadanía plena. En la primera parte del texto se presentan los principales obstáculos para definir y medir el voto indígena, así como las razones que dificultan una adecuada participación electoral indígena. Luego se discute la relación entre los pueblos amazónicos y los partidos políticos nacionales, la experiencia del MIAP y las restricciones formales para la creación de un partido indígena. Finalmente, se analizan los resultados de la participación y votación en 22 distritos ubicados en la región amazónica cuya población es mayoritariamente indígena. Los datos utilizados provienen de las instituciones electorales oficiales peruanas: el Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE), la Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE), el portal web oficial Infogob del JNE, y los Censos Nacionales de 2007 y 2017. En la medida en que forma parte de un proyecto de investigación a largo plazo que sigue en curso, incluye datos relacionados a elecciones presidenciales anteriores y también a procesos electorales locales y regionales, así como datos provenientes de entrevistas con líderes indígenas y observaciones etnográficas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Perú, elecciones, Amazonia, pueblos indígenas, participación electoral.*

INTRODUCTION

In 1821, a few weeks after proclaiming Peruvian independence from Spain, general San Martín, in a memorable speech, decreed that, from that moment on, “the aborigines shall not be called Indians or natives; they are children and citizens of Peru, and they shall be known as Peruvians.” (Anderson, 2006, pp. 49–50). With this decree, San Martín was trying to establish a modern concept of equal citizenship. Two hundred years later, the indigenous peoples in the Peruvian Amazon region still are discriminated against and marginalized, and their territories, nations, and autonomous authorities are still not fully recognized by the state, although these are rights established by the international indigenous rights legislation.

In these two hundred years, their access to electoral participation and to be elected to office has been limited. There has only been one Amazonian indigenous leader elected as representative to the National Congress and there has only been one indigenous candidate running for the presidential elections. This situation may be explained by the relatively late access to their political and electoral rights, the proportionally low number of indigenous voters, or the lack of efficient mechanisms of inclusion or positive discrimination in the electoral laws.

In the following pages, I will first discuss the difficulties to determine and measure the Amazonian indigenous vote. Then I will address some of the

main issues which constitute obstacles to adequate indigenous participation in electoral processes. I will also discuss the relationship between the Amazonian indigenous peoples and the Peruvian political parties, the experience of MIAP, and the legal restraints for establishing an indigenous party. Finally, I will analyze the last three presidential elections in Peru in 2011, 2016, and 2021 and the indigenous participation and votes in 22 districts in the Amazon with a majority of the indigenous population. For contextual purposes, I will also use information related to previous presidential elections, and local and regional elections.

I will rely mainly on the data given by the official Peruvian electoral institutions: the National Elections Jury (Jurado Nacional de Elecciones–JNE), the National Office of Electoral Processes (Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales–ONPE), and the official web portal Infogob of the JNE. As an ongoing long-term research project, I am also relying on data collected on previous occasions, including interviews with indigenous leaders and ethnographic observation. Some results of this previous research about the Peruvian Amazonian indigenous electoral participation have already been published during the last decade (Espinosa & Lastra, 2011; Espinosa, 2012, 2016, 2018, and 2020).

How to determine the indigenous vote and the indigenous candidates

One of the main difficulties in the study of indigenous electoral participation resides in the fact that it is not easy to discriminate the indigenous vote from the non-indigenous one, especially since there are no indigenous independent electoral jurisdictions (Madrid, 2005; Aragón, 2012; Pinedo, 2012). The same problem arises when trying to determine whether a candidate or elected authority is indigenous or not. In this case, the information presented by political parties or movements to the National Elections Jury (JNE) or to the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) does not contain sufficient information, or the information given is not accurate.

Only in the cases in which the JNE or the Special Electoral Juries have determined the application of the indigenous quota, the indigenous candidates are explicitly registered as such. This is important to note because not all indigenous candidates run for office through the quota system. There have been indigenous candidates before the existence of Law 27734. There are also indigenous candidates who have run for different offices not included by the law, as is the case of candidates for mayors, regional governors, or representatives at the National Congress. And there are also parties or political movements that include more indigenous candidates than those legally required. Nonetheless, this formal criterion is not entirely reliable, since some political parties or movements have also presented candidates who were not indigenous to meet the mandatory quota requirement. In those cases when this ruse has

been denounced, the lists have been challenged or crossed out, but in others, the deceit has not been detected at all due to the way in which the registration is submitted and controlled.

Another criterion used for identifying the indigenous population has been through their surnames (Echevarría, 2001; Paredes, 2008; León-Ciliotta et al., 2019; Artiles et al., 2021). However, the trouble with this criterion is that many indigenous people have surnames common to other Peruvians. This has been the case of indigenous leaders and candidates for different local, regional, and national offices with Spanish surnames such as Pérez, Soria, Vásquez, Suárez, etc.; or with surnames from other national origins, as was the case of Pedro Tomón, the first Asháninka mayor whose surname was inherited from a Japanese ancestor. An approach based exclusively on this criterion could reinforce stereotypical or racist understandings of indigenous life and politics.

A more acceptable way to determine the identification of indigenous voters has been the reference to their maternal language (Paredes, 2008 & 2015; Ames & Ponce de León, 2012; Aragón, 2012; Sulmont, 2012). However, this path may not be reliable either, as not all indigenous people have an indigenous maternal language – some have lost it, as in the case of many Kukama-Kukamiria, although they continue identifying themselves as part of an indigenous people – and definitely not all of them register this fact in the official censuses.

Obviously, none of these criteria clarify in a satisfactory way whether or not the candidates are indigenous. The only way to do so would be for the political parties or movements to explicitly indicate the ethnic background of each of their candidates in a formal registration process. In this regard, the JNE, through Resolution 2174-2010-JNE, has tried to solve this problem by requesting more information on the candidates' registration forms. However, many candidates – or sometimes also their political parties or movements – hide their indigenous identity for fear of suffering discrimination. It is not easy to forget the long history of racist practices in Peru, which have not yet completely disappeared. For this reason, many people continue to avoid expressing their ethnic or cultural identity for fear of mistreatment, as was confirmed by the results of the 2017 National Census in relation to the question referring to ethnic self-identification.¹

A safer approach to determine the ethnic adscription of a candidate would be to revise if there is any information in the official *curriculum vitae* or resumé submitted to the electoral authorities establishing the candidate's indigenous background, such as their place of birth or residence, if they are

¹ The 2017 National Census has been harshly criticized for the way in which the questions were designed, and also for its implementation, which resulted in contradictory information and a high percentage of erroneous answers. For example, according to official results, more than 1,600,000 people surveyed did not respond to the question for ethnic self-identification or their responses have been tabulated under the categories: “does not know”, “does not answer” or “does not apply”.

or have been bilingual teachers, or if they have participated or have been leaders of an indigenous organization. In some cases, it is also possible to identify indigenous candidates who are publicly known for their trajectory

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District	Province	Region	2007 Total Pop.	2007 Indig. Pop.	% Ind. Pop.	2017 Total Pop.	2017 Indig. Pop.	% Ind. Pop.
Andoas	Datem del Marañón	Loreto	9 375	5 923	63,18	11 714	11 347	96,87
Balsapuerto	Alto Amazonas	Loreto	13 868	13 200	95,18	13 707	12 229	89,22
Cahuapanas	Datem del Marañón	Loreto	6 822	5 877	86,15	6 336	6 271	98,97
El Cenepa	Condorcanqui	Amazonas	8 513	7 333	86,14	9 891	8 880	89,78
Fitzcarrald	Manu	Madre de Dios	1 263	804	63,66	1 402	1 182	84,31
Imaza	Bagua	Amazonas	21 409	15 767	73,65	25 162	20 202	80,29
Iparía	Coronel Portillo	Ucayali	10 774	8 960	83,16	10 328	8 117	78,59
Napo	Maynas	Loreto	14 882	7 691	51,68	15 003	9 035	60,22
Nieva	Condorcanqui	Amazonas	22 192	15 724	70,85	18 626	13 889	74,57
Padre Márquez	Ucayali	Loreto	5 560	2 924	52,59	3 697	1 940	52,47
Puerto Bermúdez	Oxapampa	Pasco	23 028	11 648	50,58	17 249	10 434	60,49
Purús	Purús	Ucayali	3 746	3 604	96,21	2 860	2 729	95,42
Río Santiago	Condorcanqui	Amazonas	12 606	12 206	96,83	13 953	13 356	95,72
Río Tambo	Satipo	Junín	32 575	20 318	62,37	26 036	19 690	75,63
Rumisapa	Lamas	San Martín	2 561	1 358	53,03	3 456	1 951	56,45
San Roque de Cumbaza	Lamas	San Martín	1 508	861	57,10	1 635	900	55,05
Tahuanía	Atalaya	Ucayali	7 284	5 960	81,82	8 177	6 113	74,76
Tnte. Manuel Clavero	Maynas	Loreto	3 896	2 619	67,22	2 317	1 629	70,31
Torres Causana	Maynas	Loreto	4 865	4 301	88,41	4 230	3 570	84,40
Trompeteros	Loreto	Loreto	7 450	7 234	97,10	8 396	7 944	94,62
Yaquerana	Requena	Loreto	2 396	1 724	71,95	1 929	1 214	62,93
Yurúa	Atalaya	Ucayali	1 631	1 360	83,38	1 975	1 263	63,95

Table 1.
Amazonian districts with
a majority of the indigenous
population

Prepared by the author on the basis of National Census of 2007 and 2017

as indigenous leaders. Finally, in some cases, the electoral lists at local and regional levels officially register the candidates as being indigenous persons in order to fulfill the legal quota required. However, as mentioned before, this criterion is not entirely reliable, since some political parties or movements have presented candidates who are not Amazonian indigenous to comply with the law requirements.

These obstacles limit the possible analyses to trustworthy and available data. One of the more reliable sources is the National Census of Indigenous Communities, although sometimes there are also problems with this information. There have been cases of indigenous communities registered with only one inhabitant; a fact that definitely raises serious questions about its validity. Nonetheless, it is possible to analyze the information provided for the districts with a majority of the indigenous population. After a thorough revision of both the 2007 and 2017 censuses, there is a list of 22 districts located in the Peruvian Amazon region with a majority of its population identified as indigenous (cf. Table 1).² The analyses of the electoral processes shown here have been made with data from these 22 districts, although these are not necessarily the districts with the largest indigenous population.³

The limits to an adequate Amazonian indigenous participation in electoral processes

Indigenous electoral participation is relatively recent in Peru. The first elections in which indigenous people participated, both as voters and candidates, were the municipal elections that took place at the end of 1980, after the 1979 Constitution approved the right to vote for the illiterate. And although there were some measures to include the vote of indigenous people on previous occasions, these were restricted to the Andean population (Del Águila, 2009, 2011 & 2012). It was only with the 1979 Constitution that the Amazonian indigenous population could begin to exercise their political rights in order to elect and be elected (Tuesta, 1994; Paredes, 2008; Gamboa, 2009; Espinosa & Lastra, 2011).

Since 1980, they have taken an active part in all the electoral processes, although there are important differences between their participation in national presidential elections and the local and regional ones. One of these differences resides in the fact that their vote may have more influence on the outcome of

² The 2007 and 2017 Indigenous Census only includes the rural population who live in “native communities” and does not include the indigenous population living in the cities.

³ There were 23 districts with a majority of indigenous rural population according to the 2007 census, and 37 according to the 2017 census. Only 22 of these appeared in both censuses. The only district that has proportionally lost its majority of indigenous population is the Morona district, in the Datem del Marañón province.

the local and regional ones, rather than on the national ones. The Amazonian indigenous population represents approximately 2.5 to 3% of the total national population, and therefore their votes do not make an important contribution to the final outcome of the electoral process. At the same time, the rural indigenous population is more affected by the local and regional government's decisions and policies.

This fact also favors absenteeism among the indigenous voters in the Amazon region (Tuesta, 2003; ONPE, 2005; Quintanilla, 2020). A study conducted in 75 rural districts shows that in these districts there was a higher percentage of absenteeism at the national elections – nine percentage points of difference from the urban districts –, while in the case of the municipal elections there was only 1.2% of the difference (Quintanilla, 2002, p. 311). In the 22 districts selected for this study, for the ballotage in the presidential elections of 2011,

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Districts	2011	2016	2021
Andoas	58,02	41,42	34,83
Balsapuerto	68,76	64,44	54,20
Cahuapanas	69,08	54,02	40,28
El Cenepa	70,23	47,16	45,09
Fitzcarrald	57,57	48,25	39,60
Imaza	68,66	57,33	49,40
Iparía	55,01	47,61	47,90
Napo	61,52	54,95	46,13
Nieva	68,21	50,79	43,17
Padre Márquez	56,62	50,40	44,90
Puerto Bermúdez	45,08	57,52	51,29
Purus	54,65	45,08	48,96
Río Santiago	67,23	49,12	38,03
Rio Tambo	74,14	63,46	58,20
Rumisapa	84,48	85,69	81,79
S. Roque de Cumbaza	81,27	83,29	79,88
Tahuanía	58,15	56,52	50,74
Torres Causana	45,66	43,41	40,21
Trompeteros	59,72	44,63	40,94
Tte. Manuel Clavero	43,21	48,52	32,43
Yaquerana	56,81	59,65	53,93
Yurúa	45,08	42,75	37,03
Average	61,33	54,36	48,13

Table 2. Absenteeism in ballotage elections of 2011, 2016, and 2021 in Amazonian districts with a majority of the indigenous population

2016, and 2021, on average, between 48 and 61% of the registered voters participated (cf. Table 2).⁴

Another important problem related to the indigenous participation in electoral processes, and more specifically for the election of indigenous candidates consists in the contradictions of the quota system as an affirmative action policy. Indeed, the indigenous quota was included in the Peruvian electoral system in 2002 through Law No. 27734, a reform made to the Municipal Elections Law (Law No. 26864). This quota system establishes that at least 15% of candidates on all electoral lists must be indigenous if they live in regions with an indigenous population. The same rule also applies to the regional elections, according to Law No. 27683. However, this measure has had, in general, a negative impact. Despite the criticisms made by experts and researchers (Chuecas, 2007; Rasmussen, 2008; Pinedo, 2010 & 2015; Espinosa, 2012 & 2020; Paredes, 2015; Sánchez, 2018; Jaramillo & Valenzuela, 2019; Alegre, 2020)⁵ as well as from indigenous leaders and organizations (Idea Internacional, 2012; AIDSESEP, 2015; Hurtado, 2015; Defensoría del Pueblo, 2018), this law has continued to be applied in all the electoral processes to date.

Although the quota system directly affects the regional and municipal elections, it also brings into question the current procedures to elect representatives to the National Congress. The quota systems established by the Peruvian electoral laws – such as the indigenous, gender, and youth quotas – are designed to include a specific number of candidates in the electoral list, and therefore it does not guarantee that members of these underrepresented groups will be elected as authorities. A real affirmative action should establish a fixed number of seats for municipal and regional councilors and also for representatives at the National Congress, and not only in the lists of candidates.

Another negative consequence of the quota system has been the weakening of the Amazonian indigenous movement and its political party. Before the existence of quotas, most political parties did not include indigenous candidates in their lists. The few that did were either organized by the indigenous people themselves or were those that included indigenous demands as part of their political platform. This situation offered the indigenous voters a more distinct understanding of the position of the different parties or electoral movements vis-à-vis the indigenous political agenda. However, since the implementation of the quota system, all parties have the obligation to have indigenous candidates, and therefore it has become a common practice for indigenous citizens to distribute their votes among their acquaintances in the hope that one of them will be elected. This way of casting their votes relegates

⁴ There are also other reasons for the absenteeism. For example, the distance between the indigenous communities to the voting centers imply high costs in time and money.

⁵ Paredes (2015) is one of the few analysts who consider the impacts of the quota system from a more positive and optimistic perspective. However, it should be noted that the case study on which this opinion is based is not the most representative of the Amazonian indigenous reality in Peru.

the discussion about government plans or political platforms to a secondary position. A superficial analysis of any municipal electoral process after 2002, will show how the sum of votes for indigenous candidates who ran on different lists far exceeded the votes received by mestizo candidates who ended up winning the elections. As a result of this process, the Indigenous Movement of the Peruvian Amazon (MIAP) – the political party created by the indigenous organizations for their participation in electoral processes – was debilitated in such a way, that a few years later it finally disappeared, and with it, the possibilities of developing a national-level indigenous political party practically disappeared.

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The Amazonian indigenous peoples and the national political parties and leaders

There is a historical estrangement between the national political parties and the Amazonian indigenous communities. After forty years of electoral participation, it is clear that the Peruvian political parties have not been successful in attracting the Amazonian indigenous people, neither as members nor as voters. And although there are several reasons that could be proposed to explain this distance – including the long history of discrimination and subordination of the indigenous population by the Creole and mestizo elites –, ultimately, it is related to the fact that national political parties have not been interested in the welfare of the indigenous peoples, their rights and demands.

From the perspective of the Amazonian indigenous peoples, possibly one of the worst relationships with a national party has been with APRA. Since its origins, this party has propounded the idea of Peru as a mestizo country where the indigenous population will disappear sooner or later through a positively viewed process of modernization and miscegenation (De la Cadena, 1998). And although this ideological stance has not been explicitly formulated as such in party documents, it has influenced its politics since its origins. As Davies Jr (1971) has argued, the founder of APRA, Haya de la Torre, promoted an *indigenista* rhetoric for decades, but it never led to specific political decisions in favor of the indigenous population. The evidence for this lack of practical interest in defending indigenous rights or supporting their demands is supported by the policies implemented in the two times that APRA was elected for government, in 1986 and 2006. In effect, in the two administrations of President García, and especially during his second term in office (2006–2011), no social policies for the indigenous population were implemented, but on the contrary, several of those inherited from previous administrations were dismantled. Moreover, García, as the most prominent figure of APRA in the last four decades, has often referred to the Amazonian indigenous population of Peru in derogatory terms. The indigenous peoples have been particularly offended by his “dog in the manger” postulates (García, 2007a, 2007b & 2008),

as well as his statements during and after the protests that ended on June 6 of 2009 in the so-called “Baguazo”. On this occasion, President García (2010) indicated that the indigenous peoples were not “first-class citizens.”

The great majority of the Peruvian parties have been founded in Lima or in other large cities, and their main activities occur in urban areas. In rural regions of the country, political parties are active only in the context of electoral processes. Therefore, any attempt to explain indigenous political participation or preferences made solely from an analysis of the votes obtained in an electoral process will always be limited. This error, common to political analysts or journalists accustomed to partisan urban and mestizo political life, does not take into consideration the cultural and historical factors that predetermine and influence indigenous political life. Nonetheless, the numerical results of the electoral processes constitute an input for understanding indigenous politics and should not be entirely dismissed.

The political and ideological distance between political parties and indigenous communities can be seen, for example, in the electoral results. A total of 46 indigenous mayors have been elected between 1980 and 2018 as candidates running with national political parties. This number represents approximately 38.3% of the total elected mayors in this period, including both the district and provincial elections. However, the majority of them, 74 (61.6%), were candidates participating in regional political movements. Among these, and until 2006, a significant number of them, 22 mayors (18.3%), participated in lists of explicit indigenous movements.

Participation in national political parties occurs in certain situations and generally corresponds to specific alliances established between indigenous candidates of a region or province with these parties. In some cases, there are political parties that have a “dragging” effect on electoral processes due to the position of their presidential candidates or national leaders. In the last three municipal electoral processes of 2010, 2014, and 2018, the number of alliances with national parties has decreased, while the alliance between indigenous organizations and regional movements, such as Fuerza Loretana, Integración Loretana, or Sentimiento Amazonense, among others, have strengthened.

There have also been some interesting cases of coordination between the indigenous organizations and the national parties. One of these took place in the province of La Convención (Cusco) during the 2010 elections. On this occasion, representatives of the communities and regional indigenous organizations decided, in an assembly that took place in April 2010 in the community of Kirigeti, to participate with their own party Unidad Indígena Amazónica del Cusco. However, the requirements established by the electoral laws made it difficult for them to gather the necessary signatures to register, so they decided to participate in an alliance with the national party Peru Posible of former president Toledo. This agreement enabled them to present candidates without limiting their participation to the quota requirements. Thus, the candidates for mayor of the province and of two of its districts, Echarate and Kimbiri,

were indigenous. In the case of the Echarate district, in addition to the candidate for mayor, four of the seven candidates for council members were indigenous; and in the case of Kimbiri, the entire list was made up of indigenous candidates: the candidate for mayor and the five candidates for the Municipal Council. The end result, however, was not successful. In Echarate, Peru Possible ended in the fourth place out of nine, and in Kimbiri they ended in the eighth position, also among nine lists (Espinosa & Lastra, 2010).

In general, the Amazonian indigenous peoples aspire to have their own candidates and their own political party. Since 1990, and for more than a decade, the majority of the indigenous candidates participated in the local and regional electoral processes with the *Movimiento Indígena de la Amazonía Peruana*–MIAP (Indigenous Movement of the Peruvian Amazon), although its creation was made official in 1996 during the national congress of the *Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana*–AIDESEP (Interethnic Association of the Peruvian Jungle of that year), which is the most important national-level indigenous organization of the Peruvian Amazonian peoples (Espinosa & Lastra, 2011).⁶

Between 1995 and 1998, MIAP won in several districts. In the 1995 municipal elections, at least fifteen indigenous mayors were elected in Peruvian Amazonia. In the following elections of 1998, the number increased to seventeen, and in the year 2002, it descended to thirteen, probably due to the multiplication of indigenous candidates, the quota system, and sometimes also to a certain lack of unity in each district or province.

The electoral success of MIAP has not excluded criticisms, both from within the indigenous movement and also from scholars. According to Rice and Van Cott (2006), in Peru, there were no ethnic political parties that were viable in electoral terms. To be “viable” or “successful” would mean to win one or more seats or offices, either at local or national levels of government, at least twice in consecutive electoral processes (Rice & Van Cott, 2006, p.714). However, although these requisites were fulfilled by MIAP, at least during the 1990s, nonetheless Van Cott (2005, p.141) has argued that it had limited success, “because it was unable to amass the resources necessary for registration and campaigning, and because of persistent fraud by local election officials loyal to other parties.” Another type of criticism made to MIAP was based on the permanent mistrust of national political parties and, therefore, the possibility of their leaders being politically manipulated behind the scenes. This was the case of some Shipibo candidates running with MIAP in the early 1990s, who were accused by other Shipibo leaders of being manipulated by the *Partido Unificado Mariateguista*–PUM (Espinosa, 2004).

However, MIAP was mortally wounded by the modifications made to the electoral laws, especially the quota system and the new requirements included

⁶ Van Cott (2003) mistakenly indicates the year 1999 as the date of creation of the MIAP, an error that she corrects afterwards (Van Cott, 2004), but which Huber (2008) repeats, nonetheless.

in the new Law of Political Parties (Law No. 28094). The latter, passed in November 2003, establishes that national political parties require “committees in at least one-third of the country’s provinces, located in at least two-thirds of the departments” (art.8). Thus, an indigenous national party would need to organize committees in 16 different regions. This requirement constitutes a practically unsurmountable obstacle due to the fact that there are indigenous communities – and eventually, indigenous organizations – in only 11 of the 23 departments. And, although, there are Amazonian indigenous persons living now in all of the Peruvian departments – as the last National Census recognizes – they do not always form part of an indigenous organization or an urban indigenous community.⁷

In the case of regional parties, article 9 of Law No. 28094, establishes the requirement of party committees in the majority (half plus one) of provinces of the corresponding region. Once again, the law hinders the possibility for the Amazonian indigenous peoples to have their own political parties. Only three departments – Loreto, Ucayali, and Madre de Dios – have indigenous communities in more than half of their provinces. This means that only in these three places it would be possible to have a regional indigenous party.

According to Julio Dávila (2005), these changes and restrictions openly contradict the spirit of the Peruvian Constitution and the ILO Convention-169, by not allowing the indigenous peoples the possibility of having their own political organization, and therefore, presenting their own political demands and alternatives to the rest of Peruvian society. They also constitute formal barriers that impede the creation of indigenous parties (Van Cott, 2003 & 2005), or enable the disappearance of those that already existed, as was the case of MIAP. Moreover, they challenge the argument which seeks to explain the lack of a national indigenous party in Peru based on the weakness or fragmentation of the Peruvian indigenous movement (Yashar, 2005; Paredes, 2008; Madrid, 2011), or the failure and crisis of MIAP due to the same reason (Chuecas, 2007).

In Peru, the very existence of an “indigenous movement” has often been problematized (Remy, 1994; Yashar, 1998; Quijano, 2006; Fernández, 2012), including in the case of the Amazonian indigenous peoples (Vega, 2009). Even those who have accepted its existence have explicitly established its “exceptionality” when compared to other Andean countries (Degregori, 1993 y 2002; Montoya, 1993; Gelles, 2002; Yashar, 2005; Pajuelo, 2007; Albó, 2008). According to Vega (2009), it is not possible to maintain the existence of an indigenous movement if there is not a unified organizational institution that represents the interests of the indigenous communities or peoples. However, the term “movement” was adopted by the social sciences to describe political and social organizations characterized by their flexibility, instead of following the

⁷ The Peruvian State does not recognize the urban indigenous communities. According to the Peruvian legislation only the rural “native communities” are officially recognized.

more rigid structures of political parties or other institutions. In Peru, there is a wide range of organizations and movements that, although they have different profiles, interests, or levels of institutionalization, all share a common ground: the defense of certain rights that could be considered as “ethnic” or “indigenous”. Therefore, the Peruvian “indigenous movement” would be more similar to the indigenous movements of Mexico or Guatemala characterized by Kay Warren (1998a y 1998b) as a series of initiatives and organizations with different degrees of ethnic identification, but that ultimately have in common a critical position against the nation-state model built around colonial heritage and the discrimination against its native peoples. In a similar vein, García & Lucero (2008, p. 319), discussing the Peruvian case, argue that most of the analyses have “ignored the variety and intensity of indigenous political activity in this country, preferring instead to focus on the apparent lack of organizational ability of indigenous people to form national alliances”; or, for the purposes of this discussion, it would be possible to add: “the focus on the lack of a national indigenous political party”.

Due to the new legal restrictions, in the 2002 municipal electoral process, MIAP was able to participate in only one province: Condorcanqui. A few months later, in December 2002, one of the final agreements of the XIX General Assembly of AIDSESEP, was to promote their participation in the electoral process through a renewed version of MIAP, in which the word *indígena* in its name would be replaced by the term *intercultural*. However, the obstacles brought by the reform of the electoral laws of 2002 and 2003 made it practically impossible for MIAP to register lists in the following elections, although it continued to exist unofficially for a few more years.

The impact of this crisis led most indigenous organizations to establish alliances with regional electoral movements. In April 2004, for example, former MIAP leaders from Ucayali met at Pucallpa in order to appoint its new regional authorities, discuss its reorganization, and plan its electoral strategies (Espinosa, 2004). Similar crucial political meetings occurred while I was staying at San Lorenzo, the capital city of the Datem of Marañón Province early in 2006, in which Máximo Puitsa, the official MIAP representative in the region, was also present. The leaders representing seven different indigenous peoples linked to CORPI, AIDSESEP’s regional office, discussed at length the possibility of participating in the electoral process with their own MIAP list. After a period of intense debates, the majority of regional leaders, due to the complicated requirements established by the electoral laws, decided to participate with a national party; and after several consultations, they finally chose to run with Unión por el Perú (UPP), whose presidential candidate was Ollanta Humala. However, the Achuar leaders decided to part ways and run with a different party, Somos Peru, who offered them the possibility of presenting a list headed by an important Achuar leader, Mateo Peas, former mayor of the district of Pastaza. The final result favored the UPP candidate, Emir Masegkai, an important regional Awajun leader who was previously elected, on three occasions, as

mayor of the district of Cahuapanas. This triumph was particularly significant because it was the first electoral process held after the creation of the province in 2005; having an indigenous leader as its first mayor was symbolically powerful. Unfortunately, neither Masegkai nor other indigenous leaders have won the provincial elections since then.

In more recent years, the indigenous organizations have continued discussing the importance of creating a new – and more solid – indigenous party that could replace the now extinct MIAP. According to some indigenous leaders, such as Gil Inoach (his personal communication of 2018), it would be essential for this new party to have a much stronger structure and a better internal organization, but it should also need to be more ideologically firm. Moreover, for him, a new indigenous political party should propose adequate answers to current-day national and international challenges, while at the same time expressing the world vision of the Amazonian indigenous peoples. It has to be a party that should advance the indigenous agenda while offering better living conditions for the non-indigenous population.

The presidential elections of 2011, 2016, and 2021

The Peruvian parties' lack of interest in the indigenous political demands is more noticeable during the presidential elections. In the 2006 electoral process, no national party included in its government program any concrete proposals originating from indigenous rights or demands. In some cases, declarative phrases were included in favor of cultural diversity; but these can easily be dismissed as slogans or clichés with no real programmatic political content. Only one party, Fuerza Social, indicated, and in a very general way, the “revitalization”⁸ of cultural knowledge and practices that were to be included also as part of its social policies (Vargas, 2006).

The situation slightly improved in the 2011 electoral process, partially due to the effects of the indigenous protests of 2008 and 2009 that ended with the event known as “Baguazo”, and which brought the indigenous demands to the forefront of national political debates. Nonetheless, there were only two parties with some explicit and specific proposals for guaranteeing indigenous rights: Perú Posible led by former President Alejandro Toledo, and Gana Perú led by Ollanta Humala, who in the previous 2006 elections run with UPP. It is important to highlight that, in the case of Gana Peru, there was a notable difference between the first government program presented as *La Gran Transformación* (The Great Transformation) and the second, more pragmatic plan elaborated before the ballotage, called *Hoja de Ruta* (Roadmap). This second

⁸ The indigenous peoples, their leaders and intellectuals harshly criticize the idea of “revitalization” of cultures or languages. According to them, there is no need for “revitalization” if the cultures or the languages are alive.

program was designed to attract more conservative voters, and therefore, all the social policies initially proposed to benefit the indigenous peoples were reduced to a single written line.

Most parties in 2011 continued the tradition of including some declarative phrases about the importance of the land titling process for indigenous communities, making nebulous references to the “revitalization” of indigenous traditional knowledge and customs, or mentioning the necessity to incorporate the indigenous population into the modern market economy. This was the case, among others, of the Partido Aprista Peruano (APRA) led by former president Alan García, or Fuerza 2011 led by Keiko Fujimori. There were also two parties that did not include a single sentence related to the indigenous

Districts	2011	2011-B	2016	2016-B	2021	2021-B
Andoas	Toledo	Humala	Fujimori	Fujimori	Humala	Castillo
Balsapuerto	Toledo	Humala	Kuczynski	Kuczynski	Acuña	Castillo
Cahuapanas	Toledo	Humala	Mendoza	Kuczynski	Lescano	Castillo
El Cenepa	Humala	Humala	G. Santos	Kuczynski	Humala	Castillo
Fitzcarrald	Humala	Humala	Fujimori	Fujimori	Castillo	Castillo
Imaza	Humala	Humala	Mendoza	Kuczynski	Castillo	Castillo
Iparía	Humala	Humala	Fujimori	Kuczynski	Castillo	Castillo
Napo	Toledo	Humala	Fujimori	Kuczynski	Salaverry	Castillo
Nieva	Humala	Humala	Mendoza	Fujimori	Humala	Castillo
Padre Márquez	Humala	Humala	Fujimori	Kuczynski	Acuña	Castillo
Puerto Bermúdez	Humala	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Castillo	Fujimori
Purus	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Acuña	Fujimori
Río Santiago	Humala	Humala	Mendoza	Kuczynski	Humala	Castillo
Rio Tambo	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori
Rumisapa	Fujimori	Humala	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Castillo
S. Roque de Cumbaza	Humala	Humala	Mendoza	Kuczynski	Mendoza	Castillo
Tahuanía	Humala	Humala	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Castillo
Torres Causana	Toledo	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Salaverry	Castillo
Trompeteros	Toledo	Humala	Fujimori	Kuczynski	Fujimori	Fujimori
Tte. Manuel Clavero	Toledo	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori
Yaquerana	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori
Yurúa	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori	Fujimori

B = Ballotage

Table 3. Candidates with a majority of votes in the presidential elections and ballotages of 2011, 2016, and 2021 in Amazonian districts with a majority of the indigenous population

communities or to Peruvian rural communities in general. These were Alianza por el Gran Cambio, an electoral alliance of right-wing groups led by Pedro Pablo Kuczynski and Solidaridad Nacional, a center-right party led by the former mayor of Lima, Luis Castañeda.

In 2011, in the Amazonian districts selected for analysis, the indigenous people voted for three candidates: former president Alejandro Toledo, Ollanta Humala, and Keiko Fujimori. Humala won in ten districts, Toledo won in seven, and Fujimori in five (cf. Table 3). All the districts where Toledo won are located in the Loreto region. The votes for Humala came from different regions, but he ostensibly won in the Amazonas region, where the Awajún people constitute a majority. It is important to note that in 2011, also from this same region, was elected the first and only indigenous representative for the Peruvian National Congress, Eduardo Nayap, an Awajún leader who ran with Humala's party.

Madrid (2011) has argued that these three candidates, Toledo, Humala, and Fujimori appealed to indigenous voters through a mix of populist and ethnic offers. Madrid, however, is analyzing the 2001 and 2006 presidential elections and bases his analysis on voting results from provinces with a majority of the indigenous population, including both Andean (or highland) and Amazonian (or lowland) regions. A closer look at the Amazonian voters, however, may allow a more precise interpretation.

The votes for Fujimori came mainly from districts located in the Pasco, Junín, and Ucayali regions, all located in the central Peruvian Amazon region. In both the districts of Puerto Bermúdez (Pasco) and Rio Tambo (Junín), the Ashaninka and Asheninka peoples constitute the majority, while in Ucayali the majority is composed of the Shipibo-Konibo people. In the case of the Ashaninka and Asheninka, there has always been a strong bond with Fujimori, since the days of the internal armed conflict in the 1980s. After being forced by the Shining Path guerrilla to abandon their communities and to work for them in slave-like conditions, the Ashaninka found in president Alberto Fujimori and the Peruvian Military important allies. By the end of the 1980s, the whole region was under total control of the Shining Path, and it was only in 1991 when the Fujimori administration established three military garrisons in the area. With the support of the Ashaninka *ovayeriite* or *ronderos*, the military began a counteroffensive attack against the Shining Path guerrilla. For the Ashaninka, unlike the rest of the Peruvian citizens, the armed conflict did not end in 1992 with the capture and formal rendition of Abimael Guzmán. A small group of Shining Path guerrillas did not accept the rendition of its leader, and in alliance with drug-trafficking mafias have continued their military activities until now in the Ene Valley, a territory traditionally occupied by the Ashaninka people (CVR, 2003; Espinosa, 1994, 2013 & 2021; Barrantes, 2007; Villasante, 2012 & 2019). After all these decades of living in a continuous situation of danger and warfare, a large number of Ashaninka still consider former president Fujimori as an ally against the Shining Path and have faithfully voted for his daughter in the presidential elections.

Unlike Fujimori, both Toledo and Humala offered specific proposals for Amazonian indigenous voters, some of which corresponded to the demands of the indigenous movement. And although the policies implemented in both their administrations did not fulfill the expectations of the indigenous organizations, nonetheless they were more progressive and more responsive to indigenous demands than Fujimori's government in the 1990s or the Garcia administrations.

The differences between these governments can be traced through the changes suffered by the Peruvian office in charge of indigenous affairs. In 1992, Alberto Fujimori dissolved the Instituto Indigenista Peruano, the office for indigenous affairs created in the 1940s. He also dismantled the Ministry of Education's office for bilingual and intercultural education. Under international pressure, especially from the United Nations, Fujimori was forced to create it again in 1998, but with a new name: the Secretaría Técnica de Asuntos Indígenas (SETAI) within a new Ministry, the Ministerio para la Promoción de la Mujer y los Derechos Humanos (PROMUDEH). However, this office did not have the power to design and propose public policies, but only to collaborate in the implementation of general social policies in indigenous communities.

During the Toledo administration, in 2002, after the indigenous organizations insisted on an instance with greater hierarchy and power to define indigenous policies, CONAPA was created. However, its institutional limitations and questionable leadership by Eliane Karp – Toledo's wife and head of CONAPA – led to a crisis that did not end after replacing Karp with Miguel Hilario, a Shipibo-Konibo intellectual. Before the end his term, Toledo replaced CONAPA with the Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Andinos, Amazónicos y Afroperuano (INDEPA). This new organism gained autonomy and included, for the first time, indigenous representatives on its board. INDEPA, at least in this first version, did not last long. Early in his administration, Garcia dissolved it, and once again, under international pressure, had to reactivate it almost a year later. Afterward, Garcia kept this office inoperative throughout his term, by moving it from one ministry to another; so every year the state officials working there spent most of their time adjusting their legal status and procedures. Finally, in 2010, INDEPA was absorbed by the new Ministry of Culture, while the Vice-Ministry of Interculturality became the new state office in charge of indigenous affairs.

The Amazonian indigenous peoples and organizations are familiar with this history of political decisions, and they probably cast their votes based on this experience. Humala and Fujimori obtained the two highest numbers of votes nationwide, and in the run-off election, Humala won in fifteen districts selected for this study, while Fujimori only won in seven (cf. Table 3). In terms of votes, Humala obtained 38,686 votes in these districts, which meant that 70% of the valid votes were registered, while Fujimori obtained 16,494, or the 30% of the votes. The difference in these Amazonian districts is much larger

in comparison with the national voting percentages, in which Humala won over Fujimori by only 3 points (51.5% vs 48.5%). According to Lazo (2015), Humala obtained important support from the Peruvian indigenous population and from rural areas across the country; while in the case of Fujimori, Lazo mentions that she did not fare well, in general terms, with the indigenous population. The exception, as noted before, were the districts more affected by the internal armed conflict that are loyal to the Fujimori family.

After winning in 2011, one of the first laws passed by the Humala administration was the Law of Prior Consultation (Law No. 29785) as a political response to the indigenous protests and general social unrest related to environmental conflicts, intensely exacerbated during the Garcia administration. Moreover, in his last year in office, Garcia vetoed a Law of Prior Consultation passed by Congress in 2010. And although there was a wide national consensus about the urgency of legal norms to guarantee this internationally recognized indigenous right, it has received numerous critiques regarding its text and its implementation, both from a political and a legal perspective (Benavides, 2012; Gamboa & Sneck, 2012; La Rosa, 2012; Ruiz, 2014; Guevara-Gil & Verona-Badajoz, 2018; Ilizarbe, 2019, etc.).

The Humala administration also promoted other policies for the indigenous peoples, as was the case of the Law for Indigenous Languages (Law No. 29735), or the creation of territorial reserves for peoples in isolation and initial contact that were sabotaged during Garcia's government. Nonetheless, by the end of his government, Humala's pragmatic shift to the *Hoja de Ruta* could not reduce in a significant way the pending social debts towards the Amazonian peoples, bringing frustration and shattering their expectations.

After the "Baguazo" in 2009, there has been a growing consciousness in Peru about the situation and the rights of indigenous peoples. Thus, for the 2016 electoral process, the JNE established that all national political parties should include proposals for the indigenous peoples in their government programs (Resolution No. 0305-2015-JNE); and in its annex No.6, it adds that these should be formulated from an intercultural perspective. This requirement forced all nineteen participating parties to include at least a line or two regarding the indigenous peoples, although they were mostly generic phrases, similar to the ones presented in the previous electoral process. As Richard O'Diana (2016) has suggested, it is not enough to include in government plans proposals such as the endorsement of the law of prior consultation, environmental supervision, or the titling process of native communities. These are measures already established by Peruvian legislation and it should not be necessary to mention them at all. What is needed are more specific proposals to guarantee indigenous rights and their well-being.

In the case of the 2016 elections, for the first time in Peruvian history, an Amazonian indigenous leader, Miguel Hilario, from the Shipibo-Konibo people, ran for the Presidency with Progresando Perú. In the previous elections of 2011, there were two Amazonian indigenous leaders who were interested in

running for office: Miguel Hilario, and Alberto Pizango, although their candidacies did not prosper.

Pizango, a Shawi leader with a large political trajectory, played an important role as president of AIDSESEP during the indigenous mobilizations of 2008 and 2009. The attention given by the national and international media to these protests, and particularly to the tragic outcomes of the event known as “Baguazo”, converted Pizango into an important public figure. Due to his political background, Pizango was approached by the Partido Fonavista del Perú in order to launch him as its candidate; but soon after, this party chose the lawyer José Ñique as its presidential candidate. After this rejection, Pizango tried to run with another party, the Alianza para una Alternativa Para la Humanidad (APHU),⁹ but this party did not obtain enough signatures for its formal inscription.

Unlike Pizango, Miguel Hilario did not come from a background in the indigenous movement or from active participation in local or regional politics. Hilario became involved with evangelical churches very early in his life, and due to his interests and aptitudes received different scholarships that enabled him to pursue an academic career in the United States, obtaining a Ph.D. degree in Anthropology at Stanford University. Although his Ph.D. dissertation explicitly addresses the political participation of the Shipibo-Konibo people (Hilario, 2010), the first political activity of Hilario in Peru was as president of the Comisión Nacional de Pueblos Andinos, Amazónicos y Afroperuanos (CONAPA), the office for indigenous affairs created by the Toledo administration. Apparently, president Toledo invited Hilario to head this office after meeting him at an academic event at Stanford University, where both of them had studied (Pajuelo, 2007, p.87). These experiences, as well as his connections and kinship relationships with important Shipibo leaders and activists, led him to organize his own political party, the Partido Pluralista del Peru (PPP). However, in his first attempt he could not fulfill his desire because, just like Pizango, he could not gather enough signatures to register this party.

The failure encountered in 2011 did not prevent him to continue with this dream, and finally, he could participate in the presidential elections of 2016. On this second occasion, he run with another party, Progresando Perú, which did not present a political platform built on indigenous demands. As Santiago Alfaro (2016) pointed out that it was a party that reproduced the same economic and political discourse shared by all hegemonic parties. In the end, Hilario received only 75,870 votes in total, that is, 0.35% of the total votes cast, and 0.43% of the valid votes, ending in ninth place, out of ten. Both Pizango and Hilario did not have the support of the majority of the indigenous population. According to several leaders, these candidacies were the product of their individual plans and decisions, and not the consequence of a legitimate proc-

⁹ There is a play of words here, as APHU is pronounced in the same way as the word *apu* used in the Northern Amazonian region to design the local indigenous community leaders.

ess of consultation within the indigenous movement (personal communications, 2016 and 2017).

In 2016, the number of parties proposing specific policies in favor of the indigenous population also increased in relation to the previous electoral process. The party with the best programmatic proposal for the Amazonian peoples was Frente Amplio, led by Veronika Mendoza. This alliance was formed by different left-wing groups, some of which were seriously concerned with the environment and in favor of promoting a society that enables ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity. As part of its government program, Frente Amplio proposed the reform of municipal legislation in order to include indigenous “life plans”¹⁰, as well as the creation of an indigenous electoral district for the election of indigenous representatives to the National Congress.

A few parties –Acción Popular, Perú Posible, and Patria Segura – also made explicit in their own programs some indigenous demands, such as the continuation of the land titling process, the obligatory use of indigenous languages by state officials, as well as the promotion of intercultural bilingual education or intercultural health programs. The other parties only expressed some generalities regarding land titling or prior consultation processes, or made general remarks about the value of traditional cultures.

In this presidential election, Keiko Fujimori won in fifteen of the 22 districts selected for this analysis. Veronika Mendoza won in five, and both Gregorio Santos and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski won in one each (cf. Table 3). As mentioned before, Veronika Mendoza was the candidate of Frente Amplio, while Gregorio Santos represented Democracia Directa; both of these are left-wing political parties, and both won mainly in the Department of Amazonas. Fujimori won in the same districts as in 2011, but also in several districts in the Loreto region.

In 2016, Fujimori and Kuczynski went to the ballotage, where the latter obtained the presidency. On this occasion, Fujimori won in twelve of the 22 selected districts (cf. Table 3); however, in terms of total votes, Fujimori obtained 30,612 votes in these districts, less than the 32,371 obtained by Kuczynski, which represented 51% of the votes there. The districts in which Kuczynski won were mainly those in which Humala won in 2011, and Mendoza and Santos in 2016. These three candidates probably won in these places due

¹⁰ The “indigenous life plans” (*planes de vida indígena*) are the result of strategic planning processes produced after a series of consultations and discussions within an indigenous community or organization, or within an entire indigenous people. Its main objective is to determine their priorities for the future, and therefore it serves as a planning instrument similar to those used by governments, NGOs, or private enterprises. Indigenous life plans may be used for the construction of their autonomy as culturally and ethnically differentiated peoples, or, in a more pragmatic way, for negotiating appropriate policies or budgets with different state offices, including the municipal governments, as Frente Amplio proposed. For a more detailed discussion about the indigenous life plans, cf. Bolaños & Pancho (2008), Rosero & Sánchez (2009), Vieco (2010), among others; and for the Peruvian Amazon case, cf. Espinosa (2014).

to their left-oriented politics, and therefore, the vote for Kuczynski was based on a negative logic, as a vote against Fujimori, more than based on ideological or programmatic reasons.

The indigenous vote against Keiko Fujimori was also based on the concrete historical experience suffered by the Amazonian peoples both during Alberto Fujimori's government as well as the more recent experience of the Garcia administration. An important group of indigenous leaders made a public declaration reminding this history and, thus, rejecting Fujimori as defending "anti-Amazonian and anti-indigenous" policies (Rengifo et al., 2016). In the same public statement, they denounced Fujimori's declared intentions of respecting life, earth, and the environment as false. They also criticized the Peruvian Constitution promoted by Alberto Fujimori because it meant a "new offensive to privatize indigenous territories", an attack against the indigenous peoples and their territories that continued through the alliance of *fujimorismo* with APRA that ended with the explosion of Baguazo. According to these leaders, Keiko Fujimori not only remained silent but actively supported the policies of Alan Garcia's administration, such as those based on the "dog in the manger" postulates. Moreover, they recalled how the *fujimorista* representatives in Congress voted against the prior consultation law in 2010 (Rengifo et al., 2016).

In the 2021 presidential elections, once again, the majority of political parties did not include specific policies for the indigenous peoples in their government plans. The exceptions were Frente Amplio, with Marco Arana as a presidential candidate, and Juntos por el Perú (JPP), with Veronika Mendoza, who parted ways with Arana approximately a year after the 2016 elections, when they obtained 20 seats in Congress. Arana kept control of Frente Amplio, while Mendoza founded a new party, Nuevo Perú, which could not comply with the required signatures in time for the 2021 elections, and therefore established an alliance with JPP.

The same as in 2016, Frente Amplio proposed the creation of an indigenous electoral district in order to secure seats for indigenous representatives, both in Congress and in the Andean Parliament, and it also repeated its proposal to include the "indigenous life plans" in municipal programs and budgets. It also included new proposals, such as the creation of an autonomous office with indigenous representation to monitor the exercise of indigenous rights, specific proposals designed to improve the situation of indigenous women, and measures for guaranteeing the rights of indigenous peoples in isolation or initial contact, among other policies.

As in 2016, Mendoza's program included several concrete proposals to guarantee the exercise of different indigenous rights related to their territory, health, education, political participation, administration of justice, etc. Its proposals included: the modification of the quota system in order to guarantee seats for indigenous representatives in Congress, the Andean Parliament, and also in regional, provincial and municipal councils; higher education programs

to train professionals for intercultural practices in the health, educational, and justice systems; the creation of a specialized committee, with representatives from the indigenous organizations, destined exclusively to guarantee the territorial rights of the indigenous peoples, etc. Finally, it mentioned the urgency of a new Constitution that should include the recognition of ethnic pluralism, the rights of Mother Nature, and the promotion of the “Good Life” (*Buen Vivir*), in a similar vein to the cases of Bolivia or Ecuador.

Unlike Frente Amplio and JPP, Perú Libre, the left-wing party led by Pedro Castillo, only mentioned the indigenous populations two times in its government program. The first one expressed its compliance with the prior consultation law, which, as O’Diana (2016) has indicated, should not be part of any plan as long as it is already part of the current national legislation. The other mention refers to the inclusion of indigenous and peasant communities in the administration and benefits related to the economic activities developed in their lands. In this sense, Perú Libre expresses a coincidence with other parties on the right or center-right who consider the indigenous communities as economic entities, and not as autonomous peoples with their own history, culture, and rights. It also follows the tradition established by the military regime of the 1970s that created the “native communities” in the Amazon region as agrarian organizations.¹¹ In other words, they are considered as forms of rural ownership and not as forms of ethnic organization, and this logic would explain why they are formally registered by the Ministry of Agriculture, instead of the Ministry of Culture, which is the office responsible for indigenous policies.

Peru Libre’s lack of interest in the indigenous political agenda can also be explained by the more conservative way in which they view and assess ethnic demands; an interpretation common to the majority of Peruvian left parties inspired by the Marxist tradition. In recent times it has become more arduous to define with precision what it means to be a left party (Beck, 2006; Madrid, 2010; Gudynas, 2010; Levitsky & Roberts, 2011; Gargarella, 2014; Adrianzén, 2018, etc.). From certain perspectives, it would be possible to identify two main left political tendencies in Peru in the last few decades. A possible way to understand these tendencies would be from a chronological or historical perspective, as is the case of the distinction made by Adrianzen (2018) between the parties active during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s and the leftist movements created in more recent times. According to Adrianzen, these new movements break a large tradition in Peruvian political history; a rupture that he laments. However, the difference between a “traditional” and a “new” left – or “new new-left” in Adrianzen’s terms – could be appraised from a different perspective. The latter’s political agenda is heavily defined by the importance

¹¹ Both the Law of Native Communities of 1974 (Law No. 20653) and the law of 1978 (Law No. 22175), which is still the law currently active, constitute the “native communities” as agrarian organizations regulated by the Law No. 19400.

of environmental issues and by the role played by specific groups whose political platforms are developed alongside identity frameworks (women, indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, LGTBQ+, etc.); while the “traditional” left is defined by class-oriented policies inspired in orthodox Marxist theories.

In effect, an enduring question within Marxism has been the role played by ethnic identities or by rural peoples. In the case of the peasantry, the main question within Marxism was about their place within society and within a revolution. Marx himself, in his last years of life, became more interested in the study of this social group, especially in the case of Russia (Hobsbawm, 1965; Shanin, 1984). However, mainstream Marxism remained fixed on the idea of a subordinate role of peasants in relation to the working class and/or the party, based on a quote from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, where Marx (1994 [1852], p.124) claimed that peasants could not represent themselves, but must be represented. Several scholars have already clarified that Marx did not exclude gender, ethnicity or other socio-historically constituted categories – which place individuals and groups in social hierarchies in capitalist societies – as unimportant, reducible to class position, or only understood in terms of class (Postone, 1993; Roseberry, 1997; Patterson, 2009). Nonetheless, the majority of the Peruvian political parties influenced by orthodox Marxism during the 20th and 21st centuries have emphasized the importance of class over ethnicity.

This tradition was reinforced by José Carlos Mariátegui (1979 [1928]), who defended the idea that the so-called “Indian problem” was to be solved by adequate economic and social policies. Moreover, since the 1960s, most of these parties conflated the ethnic identities of the indigenous peoples with the identity of a “peasant class”. This has also been one of the reasons why there has not been a more solid indigenous movement in those regions in Peru where there was a strong presence of left political parties with ties with peasant unions. The most radical position regarding the role of ethnic groups has been that of the Shining Path, which considered any ethnic expression as backward and anti-revolutionary, and that should, therefore, be eliminated. This attitude explains the large number of indigenous persons murdered with extreme violence and sadism during the internal armed conflict (CVR, 2003).

The predominant ideology of Peru Libre follows the “traditional” orthodox Marxist perspective, while their allies from Nuevo Peru (Veronika Mendoza’s party) and other progressive sectors belong more clearly to the “new” left. For example, in Castillo’s inaugural speech, for the first time in two hundred years, different Amazonian peoples were mentioned by name; however, six months later, there was not a single significant policy implemented in favor of the indigenous peoples; and several prominent members of Peru Libre have been harshly criticized for expressing sexist or homophobic ideas or practices.

Keiko Fujimori’s government plan, as in previous elections, made only a couple of generic remarks about the value of the indigenous cultures and the respect they deserve. These phrases, as well as the idea of promoting an “inter-

cultural” dialogue or perspective, have become sound bites repeated constantly by politicians and have found a place in the Peruvian citizens’ common sense. According to Levaggi (2021), the idea of interculturality as an ethical-political proposal has not irradiated public policies or a legal framework related to the rights of indigenous peoples, who are perceived as another “vulnerable population” that must be attended to.

Finally, the other political parties, as Zegarra (2021) has summarized, have also made generic proposals. They either have insisted upon already established legal procedures – such as the process of prior consultation – as if they were new commitments, or eventually, have formulated proposals of a purely economic nature linked to the exploitation of natural resources. In a similar vein, Levaggi (2021) agrees that, for most parties, the indigenous communities and peoples only exist as long as there are extractive activities developed in their territories. This would be true, not only for the right or center-right parties but also for Perú Libre, as was mentioned before.

In 2021, in the selected districts, the vote was more dispersed between a larger number of candidates. In 2011, the vote was divided between three different candidates. In 2016, the number increased to four, and in 2021, they were seven. Fujimori won in seven districts, Humala and Castillo won in four each, Acuña in three, Lescano in two, while Mendoza and Salaverry won in one each (cf. Table 3). In terms of ideological orientation, Castillo and Mendoza could be classified on the left, Humala and Lescano on the center-left, and Acuña and Salaverry on the center-right. Humala and Lescano won in the Northern districts where the Awajún and other Chicham peoples¹² are the majority while Acuña and Salaverry won in several districts in Loreto where Fujimori won in past years. And as in the previous elections, the districts located in the Selva Central area maintained their loyalty to Fujimori.

Castillo and Fujimori obtained the largest number of votes, so they were the two candidates in the second electoral process in 2021. This was the third consecutive electoral process in which Keiko Fujimori went to the ballotage, and on all three occasions, she lost. In the 22 selected districts, Fujimori won in seven and obtained 22,874 votes, which represents 27% of the total votes; while Castillo won in fifteen, obtaining 53,165 votes (cf. Table 3). Once again, the majority voted in favor of the party more oriented to the left, while also expressing their rejection of Fujimori, with the exception of their loyal districts located in the Selva Central region and a few others who feared a communist regime.

¹² Since 2018, the indigenous peoples formerly considered as Jivaro or Jivaroan have expressed their desire to be recognized as Chicham peoples. This change was promoted through a public declaration made by Shuar and Achuar leaders after the Yápankam congress, a political and academic meeting where this issue was widely discussed. Afterwards, other Chicham peoples, such as the Awajún and Wampís, among others, have subscribed this position. For more details, cf. Deshoullière & Utitijaj Paati (2019).

Conclusions

Amazonian Indigenous
Participation in Electoral
Processes in Peru.
The Case of 2011, 2016,
and 2021 Presidential
Elections

Oscar Espinosa

The history of electoral participation in the Peruvian Amazon confirms the interest and demand on the part of the Amazonian peoples to assume an active role in making decisions that affect their lives, which include the possibility of having an indigenous political party. At the same time, a growing number of indigenous voters mistrust an electoral system that hardly includes them. This mistrust is more evident in the case of the presidential elections – as demonstrated by a large absenteeism –, but has also been growing in the local and regional elections.

Part of the limitations for indigenous electoral participation comes from a legal framework. The current electoral laws establish strong formal restrictions for the creation of national or regional indigenous political parties or movements, and at the same time, the quota system does not guarantee a minimum of seats at the local, regional or national levels.

These limitations have not impeded the indigenous organizations to find ways to express their interests and more specific demands. In the electoral arena, this has meant the establishment of alliances with regional movements. And sporadically the discussion between the indigenous leaders about the constitution of a national party to adequately replace MIAP recurs in formal and informal settings.

Electoral politics is only one of the many possible ways in which Amazonian indigenous people live and express their political life. The indigenous organizations continue representing their interests vis-à-vis the state, participating in formal and informal spaces of dialogue and negotiation with state officials, but also through public declarations, and eventually through protests and mobilizations.

In recent years, there have been important developments in relation to their demands for autonomy and self-determination, which are fundamental rights of the indigenous peoples internationally recognized by the United Nations system. One of the results of this process of internal political debate within the indigenous societies in the Peruvian Amazon region has been the creation of autonomous governments. The most advanced, and probably the best-known case, is that of the Gobierno Territorial Autónomo de la Nación Wampis–GTANW (The Wampis Nation's Autonomous Territorial Government), which is still waiting for the state's official recognition since 2015. And in recent years, the Arakbut, Shipibo-Konibo, Awajún, and other indigenous peoples are also engaged in similar processes.

The lack of official recognition of these autonomous governments is only one of the forms in which the Peruvian state continues to marginalize and subjugate the indigenous peoples. The lack of implementation of social policies during the last three decades by the different administrations corroborates it, although there may be some exceptions. And the analyses of the political programs presented by the national parties during the last three electoral processes confirm

a general lack of interest in Peruvian society towards the demands and the rights of the indigenous population.¹³ These forms of political exclusion, added to everyday expressions of racism and discrimination towards the Amazonian peoples in Peru, show that, after two hundred years of general San Martín's proclamation, equal citizenship for all Peruvians is still a pending task.

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¹³ This is not, however, only the case of Peru. In recent decades there has been a significant setback in relation to the protection of indigenous rights in practically all Latin American countries, as has been corroborated by independent studies conducted by institutions that are not directly engaged in human rights activism, such as the Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL, 2014).

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