

**Todd A. Eisenstadt and Karleen Jones West.** *Who Speaks for Nature?: Indigenous Movements, Public Opinion, and the Petro-state in Ecuador.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 496 pages. ISBN 978-0-190-90895-9.

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Who speaks for nature? What are they saying, and how are they saying it? As the title suggests, *Who Speak for Nature?* examines these very questions. Todd A. Eisenstadt and Karleen Jones West's in-depth investigation of indigenous groups and extractive-populism in Ecuador offers not only academic contributions as to how environmental issues should be thought of and theorized, but also practical implications for those interested in speaking for nature.

Much of the book centers around the idea that people's attitudes are not independent of their context. It is not surprising then that the authors have taken special care to provide the reader with a rich understanding of the Ecuadorian context. From the outset in Chapter 1, we can see the motivation for this book is to root its contributions to environmental public opinion and social movement literature in an understanding of the places that have been previously understudied – less developed political and economic contexts. Using Ecuador as a constant source of context and sprinkling relevant discussions from other countries throughout, Eisenstadt and West offer readers a history and background to anchor themselves in as those readers consider book's thesis and its implications.

Countries in Latin America routinely rank among the highest in the world in concern for environmental issues.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as the authors note, existing explanations of public opinion draw on theories established in more developed, Western contexts. Instead of continuing to theorize on the existing explanations for environmental concern (such as post-materialism and ascriptive identities), *Who Speaks for Nature?* moves the focus of environmental public opinion research to more context-driven explanations (221). The book highlights the roles that the state, extractive industry, the international community, and physical distribution

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1. Stokes 2015, Pew Research Center 2017.

of resources have in shaping attitudes and behaviors. This deviates from existing prominent theories of public opinion which suggest that individuals' socio-economic situation or ascriptive identities drive opinion and behavior on environmental issues. Eisenstadt and West instead argue that, at both the individual- and group-level, attitudes and behaviors are influenced by past and anticipated future experiences.

Another main contribution the book makes lies in its argument about how interests ought to be articulated. Paralleling the move towards context-driven theories of opinion and social movements, the authors describe how environmental interest articulation is best served by incorporating the voices of different groups at different levels. Such polycentric pluralism can help overcome collective action dilemmas by tackling issues with a variety of actors at different levels.<sup>2</sup> Multicultural rights, on the other hand, grant autonomy and governance to indigenous groups based on ethnic identity. This is not inherently problematic. Eisenstadt and West argue, however, that organizing along indigenous identity and only amplifying those voices can ultimately dampen the pro-nature message of these groups. Multicultural rights and increased autonomy often create distance between indigenous groups and the broader state, which can result in indigenous groups losing their bargaining chip in the country's political arena. Eisenstadt and West also note that multicultural rights, which are granted based on identity, do not reflect the dynamic and varying nature of individuals' needs. At the individual-level then, multiculturalism granted at the group-level shrinks the "marketplace of interest articulation" (31). As the book moves across the seven chapters, the authors build their case for incorporating all vulnerable populations' voices in advocating for nature.

Several Latin American countries are financially dependent on extractive resources. This seems to naturally pit economic development against environmental protections, a dichotomy that has been well-researched.<sup>3</sup> Yet for many this dichotomy does not capture their views on economic development and protecting the environment. *Sumak kawsay*, or harmonious living, offers a third option where economic development can happen on a smaller, more sustainable scale directed by indigenous cosmivision (18). In Chapter 2, Eisenstadt and West show how this more sustainable way of development, *sumak kawsay*, has been co-opted and ultimately undermined in Ecuador by extractive populism policies of the former President Rafael Correa's administration. In short, Correa used the country's natural resources to fund his social campaigns, despite initial claims of prioritizing balanced development.

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2. V. Ostrom, *et al.*, 1961; Ostrom, 2010

3. See, for example, Drews *et al.*, 2018; Drews *et al.*, 2016; Dunlap & Scarce, 1991.

Chapter 2 then goes on to describe how the extractive populism of the Correa administration has left many Ecuadorians vulnerable to environmental degradation threats. Frequently, the threatened populations are indigenous groups, which has often resulted in ethnic identity being touted as an explanation for environmental attitudes and behaviors. Eisenstadt and West argue, however, that it is the vulnerability, not indigenous ethnic identity, that motivates individuals' concern for the environment at the individual-level and action at the group-level. Simultaneously, the authors also reject the notion that post-materialism, a long-cited explanation of public opinion on environmental issues, is applicable to the Ecuadorian and other contexts.<sup>4</sup> Using their representative survey of Ecuador, Eisenstadt and West find further evidence that post-materialism does not explain environmental attitudes in Ecuador. Vulnerability, on the other hand, does shape environmental concern, with importance nuance in the role of vulnerability. The individual-level analysis in Chapter 2 suggests those who live in areas that are debating future extraction are considerably more concerned about the environment than those who are not. Those who live in areas where oil extraction has already happened, however, are no more or less concerned than those living in non-extraction areas. Others have found that exposure to environmental vulnerability or local weather can shape environmental attitudes.<sup>5</sup> The nuance of future versus past degradation due to extraction exposure, however, is a novel and important contribution to this literature.

In several Latin American countries, indigenous groups are consulted prior to an extraction project. This “prior consultation,” or *consulta previa*, is meant to eliminate or mitigate the conflict and harm surrounding extraction projects. In Ecuador, however, these consultations are not required by law and are implemented inconsistently. In Chapter 3, Eisenstadt and West provide examples of prior consultation being used as a political bargaining tool that is generally only implemented when the Ecuadorian government knows the extraction projects will be approved. This inconsistent implementation of prior consultation also can be (and has been) used to divide indigenous groups by extending benefits to some groups and not others (also discussed in Chapter 4). Indeed, they find that support of the use of prior consultation splits along partisanship, rather than indigenous identification. In line with the overarching goal of the book, Eisenstadt and West highlight how prior consultation, which is rooted in multicultural rights, neglects to include those non-indigenous groups who are affected by extraction in the prior consultation processes. Given that vulnerability is identified in Chapter 2 as

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4. Inglehart 1981.

5. Egan & Mullin 2012; Brooks *et al.*, 2014; Shao *et al.*, 2014; Borick & Rabe 2010; Bishop, 2013; Switzer & Vedlitz 2016.

a key determinant of attitudes, excluding non-indigenous yet still vulnerable populations may contribute to weaker pro-nature messages and action.

In Chapter 4, Eisenstadt and West continue their examination of individual-level public opinion, but they nest this individual-level discussion within a broader discussion of differences in experiences among various indigenous populations in Ecuador. By doing so, the authors push theorization beyond operationalizing social movements as indigenous versus not. That structural operationalization is not a sufficient explanation for why some movements are successful in stopping extraction projects and others are not. Instead, the authors identify variation in attitudes towards extraction across indigenous groups using survey data and in-depth interviews. Combining these data with historical context, Eisenstadt and West provide convincing support for the argument that a group's interactions with the state and previous experiences and future anticipated experiences with extraction inform their attitudes about extraction. They find that living in an area that has already been degraded is associated with prioritizing non-environmental issues, both at the individual-level and group-level. Among the groups who live in areas where extraction is being debated, however, there is variation in support for whether extraction should occur. This variation, relating back to Chapter 3, is due in part to the Ecuadorian state's use of prior consultation to divide and conquer. Since variation exists along past experiences both with extraction and prior consultation, Eisenstadt and West again highlight the need to move away from ascriptive identities as a relevant explanation for both individual-level and group-level attitudes and behaviors.

Chapter 5 pivots to examine belief in climate change. Indigenous identity, as shown in the previous four chapters, is not a sufficient explanation for environmental concern and related behavior. Indigenous cosmivision, however, may help explain attitudes towards issues like climate change, a more abstract version of environmental attitudes. Using an analysis of survey data, Eisenstadt and West find that individuals who are disposed to believe in indigenous cosmivision are more likely to believe that climate change exists. Interactions between religiosity and religious affiliation (Catholic, Evangelical) also indicate that the propensity to believe in climate change is stronger for more adherent Catholics, while stricter adhering Evangelicals are less likely to believe in climate change. It is worth noting that 94 % of the sample believes climate change exists, so there is not very much variation to be explained by these factors. The authors' conclusions may have differed with a different measure of climate change belief. By illustrating that climate change belief is high among both indigenous and non-indigenous groups alike, however, Eisenstadt and West make a continued case for the call of polycentric pluralism, which would encourage more inclusiveness based on vulnerability rather than identity.

Chapter 6 moves the discussion about polycentric pluralism to the international stage. At various points throughout the book, Eisenstadt and West repeatedly

note the role that former President Correa has had in shaping existing attitudes and behaviors related to the environment. His incorporation of *Pachamama*, or Mother Earth, into the country's constitution elevated him to the status of environmental champion in the eyes of the international community. His commitment to *sumak kawsay* gave the impression that he was invested in protecting the country's resources and people. Eisenstadt and West argue, however, that this posturing was ultimately a tool to be able to justify his extractive populism at home. The authors' survey data suggest that this was an effective way to shift blame to foreign companies and countries. Most respondents oppose Chinese or U.S. drilling efforts. There is division, however, along partisan lines for support of Ecuadorian-directed extraction. Since indigenous groups do not support a single party as multiculturalism would predict, the authors again illustrate that a multicultural rights approach misses important variation within the large, diverse indigenous community. It also would not address the very real political divisions that exist in Ecuador and the indigenous community.

In Chapter 7, the reader is reminded of all the evidence the authors have compiled to support their contention that existing explanations of public opinion and social movements are insufficient. Instead of relying on indigenous identity and post-materialism, the authors show robust evidence that vulnerability to future extraction predicts individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Multicultural practices that focus on indigenous identity, like prior consultations with indigenous leaders, leave out non-indigenous individuals and groups who will also likely be affected by future extraction. Multiculturalism also assumes that all individuals in the indigenous groups hold the same views. Polycentric pluralism, not multiculturalism, would allow for the articulation of interests of vulnerable populations beyond indigenous groups. When groups organize around vulnerability and work towards polycentric pluralism, Eisenstadt and West argue, speaking for nature may be the most successful.

This short review of *Who Speaks for Nature?* does not at all convey the impressive contributions that the research makes, nor does it convey the more nuanced points to the authors' arguments. Eisenstadt and West continue to move research on public opinion away from the post-materialism framework by showing throughout the book that economic well-being does not explain environmental attitudes. Similarly, they also show that indigenous identity is not a sufficient explanation for why some social movements are successful in speaking for nature. Instead of these static factors, Eisenstadt and West offer a more dynamic theory based on vulnerability that allows for attitudes and behaviors to vary across and within indigenous groups. While traditional multiculturalism allows for organization around ethnic identity, polycentric pluralism allows for the organization around vulnerability. By adopting a polycentric approach, there is opportunity to bring those who are most vulnerable to the table and achieve optimal outcomes for individuals, groups, and nature.

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