

Research Focus

Indigenous peoples maintained sophisticated environmental management practices for millennia before colonization disrupted these systems.

Research examines how varying degrees of Indigenous participation in early state-building affects contemporary integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

RQ1: How do Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty challenge traditional IR theories of state-centric territorial control?

RQ2: How does Indigenous inclusion in early state-building affect contemporary TEK integration in environmental governance?

Hypotheses

H1: Greater Indigenous inclusion in early state-building processes leads to more effective integration of TEK in contemporary environmental governance.

Null Hypothesis: No significant relationship exists between early Indigenous inclusion and contemporary TEK integration.

Literature Review

Limitations of Classical IR Theory

- **Realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism**
 - Treats land as territory rather than relationship (Weber 1918)
 - Cannot account for sovereignty emerging from land-based obligations (Morgenthau 1948; Mearsheimer 2001)

Indigenous Sovereignty

- Emerges from obligations to Country/land (Watson 2015)
- Exists independent of state recognition (Watson 2018)
- Understands land as kin rather than property (Watson 2009)

Decolonial Environmental Justice

Colonial disruption of Indigenous environmental practices represents both ecological and cultural violence with ongoing consequences for governance systems (Weir et al. 2021; Dhillon 2018).

First Nations, First Knowledge: Indigenous Sovereignty and Environmental Governance in Australia, Brazil, and Aotearoa New Zealand

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Methodology

Comparative case study using Method of Difference examining three settler-colonial states with different approaches to Indigenous sovereignty recognition.

IV: Indigenous inclusion in early state-building

- Constitutional/legal recognition
- Indigenous representation in governance
- Treaty relationships

DV: TEK integration in environmental governance

- Formal recognition in legislation
- Decision-making authority for Indigenous communities
- Implementation of Indigenous-led practices

Findings

Australia

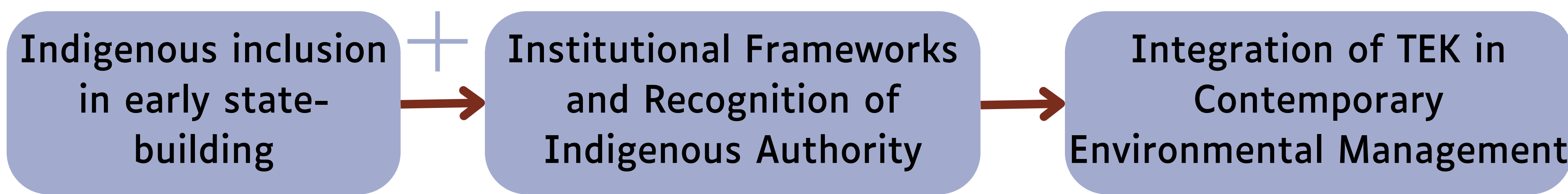
- Historical: Terra nullius doctrine denied Aboriginal sovereignty; no treaty (Watson 2015)
- TEK System: Cultural burning practices (65,000+ years) (Clarkson et al. 2017; Mariani et al. 2022)
- Integration: Low-medium; bureaucratic barriers persist despite scientific validation (Williamson 2022)

Brazil

- Historical: Indigenous peoples classified as "relatively incapable" (1916); late recognition (1988) (Rodrigues 2002)
- TEK System: Forest management (Posey 1997)
- Integration: Medium but variable by region; implementation gaps (Urzedo et al. 2021)

Aotearoa New Zealand

- Historical: Treaty of Waitangi (1840); four Māori seats (1867) (Orange 1987; Walker 2004)
- TEK System: Kaitiakitanga (guardianship)
- Integration: High; co-management arrangements; legal personhood for natural features (Macpherson & O'Donnell 2018)



State	Inclusion	Institutional Framework	TEK Integration
Australia	Low	No formal recognition	Low-medium
Brazil	Medium	Partial recognition	Medium (but variable)
Aotearoa	High	Partial recognition	High

Conclusion

Meaningful integration of TEK requires reconsidering how we understand authority, responsibility, and relationship with the natural world. Effective climate responses depend not just on adopting Indigenous techniques but on recognizing Indigenous peoples as sovereign nations with inherent authority derived from ancient relationships with lands and waters.

Implications

- Conventional IR theory insufficient for understanding Indigenous-state relations (Wendt 1995)
- State formation processes establish enduring institutional pathways for recognizing or marginalizing Indigenous knowledge (Wolfe 2006)
- Recognition of Indigenous peoples as nations with inherent authority improves environmental outcomes (Fletcher et al. 2021)