

Bolivian Strategic Culture

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FINDINGS REPORT

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The FIU-SOUTHCOM Academic Partnership

Strategic Cultures Assessments

Florida International University's Applied Research Center (FIU ARC), in collaboration with the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and FIU's Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC), has recently formed the FIU-SOUTHCOM Academic Partnership. The partnership entails FIU providing the highest quality research-based knowledge to further explicative understanding of the political, strategic, and cultural dimensions of state behavior and foreign policy. This goal will be accomplished by employing a strategic culture approach. The initial phase of strategic culture assessments consists of a year-long research program that focuses on developing a standard analytical framework to identify and assess the strategic culture of ten Latin American countries. FIU will facilitate professional presentations of the following ten countries over the course of one year: Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. In addition, a findings report on the impact of Islam and Muslims within Latin America will be produced.

The overarching purpose of the project is two-fold: to generate a rich and dynamic base of knowledge pertaining to the political, social, and strategic factors that influence state behavior; and to contribute to SOUTHCOM's Socio-Cultural Dynamics (SCD) Program. Utilizing the notion of strategic culture, SOUTHCOM has commissioned FIU ARC to conduct country studies in order to explain how states comprehend, interpret, and implement national security policy *vis-à-vis* the international system.

SOUTHCOM defines strategic culture as follows: "the combination of internal and external influences and experiences – geographic, historical, cultural, economic, political and military – that shape and influence the way a country understands its relationship to the rest of the world, and how a state will behave in the international community." FIU will identify and expound upon the strategic and cultural factors that inform the rationale behind the perceptions and behavior of select states in the present political and security climate by analyzing demography, history, regional customs, traditions, belief systems, and other cultural and historical influences that have contributed to the development of a particular country's current security rationale and interpretation of national security.

To meet the stated goals, FIU ARC will host a series of professional workshops in Miami. These workshops bring subject matter experts from all over the US and Latin America together to explore and discuss a country's specific history, geography, culture, economic, political, and military climates *vis-à-vis* strategic culture. At the conclusion of each workshop, FIU publishes a findings report, which is presented at SOUTHCOM.

The following Bolivia Findings Report, authored by Dr. Eduardo Gamarra, is the product of a working group held in Miami on January 14, 2010, which included 11 prominent academic and private sector experts in Bolivian history, culture, geography, economics, politics, and military affairs.

The views expressed in this findings report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government, US Department of Defense, US Southern Command, FIU ARC, or Florida International University.

On behalf of FIU-ARC, we wish to acknowledge and thank all of the participants for their contributions, which made the Bolivian Strategic Culture workshop a tremendous success.

Preliminary Report

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Executive Summary

- In Bolivia, historical and structural realities, such as Bolivia's experience with colonialism, the overwhelming significance of natural resources such as silver, tin, and hydrocarbons, periodic wars against its neighbors, and a pattern of profound socio-economic exclusion, have provided the backdrop for the emergence of a political culture that rationalized this historical-structural setting into a comprehensive core set of values and views.
- This legacy is expressed in Bolivia's Strategic Culture, a three-pillar political culture of victimization that includes a rapacious economic elite, pillaging neighbors, and other foreign powers, including the United States
- The image of Bolivia as a "beggar on a throne of gold" is paralleled by a domestic view that the country is privileged with all types of natural resources, ranging from minerals to hydrocarbons. One of the most important dimensions of Strategic Culture is the deeply-held view that as a country with profound wealth in natural resources. At the same time, however, Bolivia is still one of the poorest and most unequal nations in the Hemisphere.
- The question of how to fund the exploration and subsequent development of these natural resources has always been at the core of all political debates, and has fueled intense battles that have sometimes been violent, involving even neighbors and other foreign actors. This question has also been the most important in resolving the limits of State and private sector action.
- Geopolitics has taught Bolivia that it has redefined itself through conflict, armed violence, and international wars aimed at pillaging natural resources. Geopolitics involves an attempt by foreigners to control and dominate natural resources. In Bolivian Strategic Culture, natural resources and geopolitics are intrinsically linked in the mindset of the average Bolivian, its rulers and the armed forces.
- The victimization puzzle in Bolivian Strategic Culture involves the country's economic elite, repeatedly labeled as a "neoliberal oligarchy." While the resolution of international conflict (such as the War of the Pacific and the Chaco War) contributed to deepening Bolivia's mistrust of its neighbors, it also contributed to a profound distrust of the country's economic elite, particularly the business sector. This idea has contributed to the profound sense that the business community always places its particular interests over those of the nation.
- The Wars against Chile, Brazil and Paraguay reinforced a notion that was already prevalent throughout Latin America: the need for natural resources to be managed solely by the State, and that the way to achieve that goal was to nationalize any

foreign company that may have been engaged in exploration or production of hydrocarbons. The embodiment of this view was revolutionary nationalism and a vague notion of anti-imperialism.

- Repeated losses of national territory to its neighbors is tied to the development of Bolivian Revolutionary Nationalism (RN), broadly defined as both a set of State-centered policy options and a mentality of nationalism, Statism, and profound distrust of the private sector and foreign investment. The anti-imperialist, anti-private enterprise, statist, and nationalist discourse became central to Bolivian politics, mainly as a result of the role played by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) before, during, and after the 1952 Revolution. RN is a central component of the MAS, the movement that provided President Morales with a political instrument to achieve power in 2005. RN represents the key dimension of Bolivian Strategic Culture.
- Bolivian victimization culture involves the profound notion that indigenous Bolivians have been systematically excluded in social, political and economic terms for the past 500 years. In other words, despite the Revolution of 1952 and the democratization experience of the past two decades, the indigenous majority has been purposely and systematically excluded. This arguable notion, based on the profound and lamentable reality of poverty and inequality, has become one of the legitimizing concepts of the current Morales administration. In contemporary Bolivia, the central premise of this legitimizing rhetoric is the idea that the colonial experience (internal and external) ended only in 2005 with the election of Evo Morales.
- Bolivia, like other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, possesses an incomplete State characterized by a very weak institutional setting, little or no control over vast sectors of its national territory, an inability to enforce public policy uniformly, and a recurrent challenge to the legitimate monopoly over the use of force.
- Over the course of its history, political actors in Bolivia have repeatedly re-founded the country, led coups and counter-coups, and proclaimed new nation-saving pacts. The 1952 Revolution and the current moment under Morales are emblematic of these efforts. In the end, while these historical moments transform the country in significant ways, the State remains incomplete; it is an unfinished project which in turn generates a new cycle of renewed re “foundational” promises.
- A characteristic of Bolivia as an incomplete State is the prevalence of political pacts between politicians, the elite, distinct social sectors, and the military. These

pacts generally opt for authoritarian or quasi-authoritarian solutions aimed at consolidating political hegemony which is organized around networks to redistribute patronage (jobs, contracts, and natural resource revenue) among regime supports.

- The explanation for an incomplete State in Bolivia can also be found in the hypothesis that a true rentist pact exists between those who rule, the elite, and the best organized social groups who obviously rotate in and out of politics, but which in the long run do not modify the logic of this pact but which for the rest of the country functions more as a trap. The rentist pact is structured around the control and capture of the revenue (rent) generated by the production of hydrocarbons.
- Bolivian Strategic Culture is deeply rooted in the development of Bolivia's labor unions, most of which are the product of the mining economy, the Chaco War, and the 1952 Revolution. The most significant expression of these labor unions was the miner's federation (Federacion Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia-FSTMB), which was heavily influenced by revolutionary nationalism and by Trotskyite and Marxist thought. Since the 1940s, radical labor unions have confronted the State, seeking to obtain social gain through a myriad of strategies, ranging from strikes to outright rebellion. These organizations gave life to notions of anti-imperialism, nationalization, and a rejection of private ownership of Bolivia's natural resources.
- Since the transition to democracy in the early 1980s, coca growers' unions have substantially grown in strength and remained active in politics. Coca farmers, displaced mine workers, military officers, traffickers, and political parties all participate in the illicit coca-cocaine economy. The growth of this immense and intricate complex, its concomitant web of corruption and joint Bolivian-US efforts to combat its proliferation, all taxed Bolivia's weak political system and had ramifications beyond a law enforcement or national security perspective.
- One of the constants of Bolivian politics has been the conflict between those who are in power and those who demand a greater share of the patronage spoils from the outside. The contemporary period is not immune from this profound dynamic.
- Bolivian Strategic Culture fits comfortably within the confines of contemporary definitions of illiberal democracy. Given the overwhelming importance of syndicalism, liberal democracy has been difficult to institutionalize in a political culture that expresses high support for democracy and defines Bolivia as "plurinational," and simultaneously reveals very high levels of intolerance by enforcing limited political pluralism.

- Bolivian Strategic Culture is largely defined by significance of several strong men whose role determined the course of history and influenced political culture and recurrent political practice. For some authors, that independence from Spain was forged by men on horseback who played a decisive role in legitimizing irregular and illegitimate changes of government. Strong men on horseback in the 1800s became men in helicopters in the 1960s and indigenous contemporary saviors bent on changing the rules to suit their particular and sometimes peculiar political ambitions.
- The profound regional divisions that have plagued national unity and the very formation of the national State. With the exception of the central government, which grew disproportionately in size to meet the employment needs of the middle class, the State has had virtually no control over its national territory, and has struggled with attempts to impose authority in remote and not so remote corners of the country. The vastness of the territory and the inadequacy of institutions and resources made it a virtual impossibility for the State to control the country's geography. To add to this weakness, the country has always been plagued by profound regional tensions pitting the eastern lowlands against the highlanders.

Introduction

The election of Evo Morales in 2005 is often characterized as the end of a corrupt, oligarchic party-centered regime that excluded indigenous people and the poor in the name of a foreign imposed “neoliberal” economic strategy. To some Bolivians, this was the Latin American version of South African apartheid; mestizo politicians were the functional equivalent of white rule; Evo Morales and his MAS embodied Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress.

This caricature of Bolivia in the middle part of the present decade served the new political class very well, not only in terms of the degree of control over the country that Morales and his MAS have attained, but also in the remarkable degree of international favorable attention that the Bolivian government has received. This findings report argues that this view of contemporary Bolivia is deeply rooted in the country’s Strategic Culture.

With great success, Morales and his supporters have championed the notion that the new government was conducting a peaceful democratic revolution. In this sense, “change” became the key concept that guides the president and his movement. How much change has indeed occurred is arguable. A new ruling elite is in place; a new constitution was approved (albeit via dubious constitutional measures); and, on the surface, it appears that the economic strategy is also new. The old political elite has left government and some of its members in self-imposed exile in various countries, including the United States, Spain, Brazil, and Peru.

Despite the evident changing of the political guard, the new government has done little to change the basic structure of the polity, society and economy, and, by extension, to fundamentally transform Strategic Culture. If anything, the Morales government is a twenty-first century version (with some modern adjustments) of a type of regime that Bolivia unsuccessfully attempted to institutionalize throughout the twentieth century.

The recurrent pattern of zero-sum politics resurfaced in 2005, after nearly two decades, when competing political actors saw mutual gains in coming together to address public policy challenges. At the same time, political patronage achieved new heights; since 2005, loyalty oaths to the MAS appear to be the only merit required to achieve a public post. Moreover, the system paradoxically mirrors the neo-patrimonial pattern of the 1970s, with Morales serving as a quasi prince, the Bolivian State as his royal

household, and members of the private sector, indigenous groups, and others serving as his regal retainers.¹

The new ruling elite is slightly different in ethnic terms, although it is much less indigenous than the rhetoric that the government and its supporters suggest. While the new political elite is somewhat distinct in physical appearance, its comportment essentially follows the same pattern that has been the case throughout Bolivian history. This pattern is firmly rooted in the elements that comprise the core of the Strategic Culture of this Andean nation.

The Origins and Keepers of Bolivian Strategic Culture

In Bolivia, the origins must be analyzed along with the keepers of Strategic Culture. Historical and structural realities, such as Bolivia's experience with colonialism, the overwhelming significance of natural resources such as silver, tin, and hydrocarbons, periodic wars against its neighbors, and a pattern of profound socio-economic exclusion provided the backdrop for the emergence of a political culture that rationalized this historical-structural setting into a comprehensive core set of values and views.

This historical-structural setting and the resulting Strategic Culture are analyzed below. Bolivian Strategic Culture is understood as a conglomerate that links historical-structural realities to a comprehensive worldview that transcends class, race, ideology, and even specific moments in this Andean nation's complex political experience.

A Beggar on a Throne of Gold

Over the past fifty years, historians and journalists have often referred to Bolivia as a beggar on a throne of gold. This image of Bolivia is paralleled by a domestic view that the country is indeed privileged with all types of natural resources, ranging from minerals to hydrocarbons. This imagery was established early on with the discovery of silver in the Cerro Rico of Potosi. Bolivians claim that the Cerro Rico provided the bulk of the funding for the entire Spanish colonial experience, and that even today, 90% of all

¹See James M. Malloy and Eduardo Gamarra, *Revolution and Reaction: Bolivia 1964-1984* (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1988) for a discussion of neo-patrimonialism during the 1970s.

the silver in circulation came out of the mines of Potosi. At the same time, however, Bolivia is still one of the poorest and most unequal nations in the Hemisphere.

Bolivia is indeed a vastly rich nation in natural resources. The silver mines of Potosi were by far the most significant source of income for the Spanish Crown. Subsequently, Bolivia's mineral wealth—especially tin after 1880 and until the mid twentieth century—served as the country's principal source of income. And, since the 1930s, Bolivia has identified hydrocarbons, especially natural gas and petroleum, as the natural resources that will fund its development well into the twenty-first century.

The question of how to fund the exploration and subsequent development of these natural resources has always been at the core of all political debates, and has fueled intense battles that have sometimes been violent, involving even neighbors and other foreign actors. This question has also been the most important in resolving the limits of State and private sector action. The answer to this question has also helped to define Bolivian Strategic Culture. The notion that Bolivians are sitting on vast mineral and hydrocarbons resources—but are incapable of developing these deposits because of limited access to technology and capital investment—has a profound impact on the country's SC.

Pillaging Neighbors, Foreigners and the Native Economic Elite

One of the most important dimensions of Strategic Culture is the deeply-held view that as a country with profound wealth in natural resources, Bolivia has been repeatedly pillaged by foreigners since the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadores and their discovery of silver. Following Francovich, Laserna describes this perception as the Black Legend of the foreign exploitation of Bolivia's wealth during the colonial era:²

This memory was reconstructed during the wars of Independence when all evils were attributed to the colonial power accusing it of having monopolized violence with its insatiable voracity for Bolivian wealth. Economic poverty, institutional

² Roberto Laserna, *Cultura Estrategica en Bolivia: La Fuerza del Pacto Rentista*, paper presented at the Workshop on Strategic Culture, January 14, 2010, Applied Research Center, Florida International University.

weakness, lack of infrastructure and public services were all explained by the foreign sacking of the country's wealth.

Laserna notes that this Black Legend has been recycled continuously throughout the 200 years that have transpired since independence from Spain was declared. The Spanish Empire was succeeded by others, and the Conquistadores were replaced by multinationals. Following silver, tin was mined, then rubber from the forests in Pando, and finally hydrocarbons in the late twenty-first century and the beginning of the present century. And, since poverty has continued, the ruling elite, distinct social groups, political parties, and the armed forces have periodically appealed to the image of greedy foreigners who are always on the prowl for Bolivian wealth, and who are naturally working with local oligarchs and the political rivals of any particular moment. In other words, Bolivia's Strategic Culture is rooted in a three-pillar political culture of victimization that includes a rapacious economic elite, pillaging neighbors, and other foreign powers, including the United States.

First, Bolivia is viewed as the victim of its neighbors, each of which at some point took a piece of its national territory in a quest to secure natural resources ranging from minerals and hydrocarbons to rubber and nitrates. Conroy notes that Bolivia's history of humiliating defeats and territorial losses at the hands of neighboring countries resulted in the loss of about half of Bolivia's original territory:

The most significant of these was the loss of land resulting from the War of the Pacific with Chile. This loss, which left Bolivia landlocked, greatly increased transportation costs and significantly hindered the exportation of the nation's raw materials. Even more significantly, this event led to a permanent feeling of "psychological isolation" in Bolivian foreign policy, which has contributed to external strategies which are influenced more by emotion than practicality. Since then, Bolivia's overriding foreign policy goal has been to regain access to the Pacific Ocean; this objective is partly practical—direct access to the ocean would

allow Bolivia to export its raw materials more effectively—but it is also important psychologically, serving as an end in itself as a matter of national pride.³

Toranzo argues:

Geopolitics showed and [has] taught Bolivia that it has redefined itself through conflict, armed violence, and international wars aimed at pillaging natural resources. Bolivians[looks] to the salt war with Chile[,] also known as the War of the Pacific (1879-1883); the rubber war with Brazil, also known as the Acre War (1899-1903); the petroleum war with Paraguay, also known as the Chaco War (1032-1935). For Bolivians[,] therefore, geopolitics is nothing more than an attempt by foreigners to control and dominate natural resources. In Bolivian Strategic Culture[,] natural resources and geopolitics are intrinsically linked in the mindset of the average Bolivia[n], its rulers and the armed forces.

Toranzo also stresses the impact of territorial loss at the hands of pillaging neighbors bent on securing access to Bolivia's natural resources:

...Territorial losses generated and continue to generate mistrust of Bolivia's neighbors, something that makes it difficult to develop shared international policies. The prevalent culture, following each of these wars, was mistrust not only of its neighbors but of other more distant countries which are seen from Bolivia as having only an interest in looting, exploiting, and expropriating its natural resources. ... If any nation shows an interest in establishing relations with Bolivia, our country asks: what are its real evil intentions? What territory and resources is it after? ... This fear of pillagers is linked to a profound culture of victimization as Bolivians always view themselves as someone's victim and the object of foreign conspiracies. This dimension of Bolivian Strategic Culture also

³ Annabelle Conroy, Strategic Culture in Bolivia, Paper presented at the Workshop on Strategic Culture, Applied Research Center, Florida International University, January 14, 2010.

means that its leaders lack the analytical capacity to evaluate the country's own limitations and errors."⁴

The victimization puzzle in Bolivian Strategic Culture involves the country's economic elite, repeatedly labeled as an oligarchy. In today's lexicon, it is usually described as a "neoliberal oligarchy." Placing this in historical context, while the resolution of international conflict (such as the War of the Pacific and the Chaco War) contributed to deepening Bolivia's mistrust of its neighbors, it also contributed to a profound distrust of the country's economic elite, particularly the business sector. The prevalent view, for example, is that private mine owners and the elite were allied with Chilean interests and thus were both unpatriotic and traitors.

A wide-ranging belief is that, while the armed forces fought the War of the Pacific to maintain territorial integrity, businessmen were interested more in protecting their own interests by turning national territory over to foreigner interests. This idea has contributed to the profound sense that the business community always places its particular interests over those of the nation. In the case of the War of the Pacific, the general sense is that the business community worked out a deal with Chile privileging its particular interests through a 1904 treaty establishing the new territorial boundaries.

The centrality of this view to Bolivian Strategic Culture was evident in the early part of this decade, when President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, a wealthy businessman tied to the mining sector, was forced to resign by a rioting mob that claimed he had handed over Bolivia's natural gas to both Chilean and American interests. Sanchez de Lozada was the incarnation of those economic elite who repeatedly negotiated both territory and natural resources to obtain private gain.⁵

This distrust of the business community eventually found itself enshrined in the politics of the early twentieth century, and then in both the 1952 Revolution led by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement and the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) in

⁴ Carlos Toranzo, Bolivia: Cultura estratégica, Paper presented at the Workshop on Strategic Culture, Applied Research Center, Florida International University, January 14, 2010.

⁵ The irony of Sanchez de Lozada's ousting was that he was the leader of the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement, the party that led the 1952 Revolution which nationalized the mining industry. Sanchez de Lozada was, in a very real sense, the embodiment of the new economic elite created by the Revolution and those who forced him to resign, including current President Evo Morales. He was also a creation of that very significant event in Bolivian history.

2005. In other words, the business community is a part of the “anti-nation,” a concept so often utilized by populists in all of Latin America but which has an even more concrete meaning in Bolivia.

The Wars against Chile, Brazil and Paraguay also reinforced a notion that was already prevalent throughout Latin America: the need for natural resources to be managed solely by the State, and that the way to achieve that goal was to nationalize any foreign company that may have been engaged in exploration or production of hydrocarbons. As Toranzo notes, the embodiment of this view was revolutionary nationalism and a vague notion of anti-imperialism. And, more important, this view brought together middle sectors, civilians and military, workers, and peasants in a political culture that transcended specific governments.

In some measure, the distrust of the business community reinforced the profound belief that the State’s central role was to protect Bolivians from rapacious businessmen and their foreign allies. Paradoxically, Bolivia is a country where foreign companies have had little presence, comparatively speaking. The Revolution of 1952 nationalized the mining interests of three Bolivian family-owned business organizations: Patino; Aramayo; and, Hirschfeld. In other words, when the State acted to nationalize the tin mines, it did not expropriate foreign-owned enterprises.

Nationalization took on foreign enterprises only during the late 1960s, when a military populist government expropriated Gulf Oil Corporation, a US company that had been largely involved in exploration activities.⁶ When Evo Morales assumed office in 2005, few sectors in Bolivia were opposed to the nationalization of the variety of foreign companies that invested in hydrocarbons, telecommunications, and transportation. Public opinion polls repeatedly show how Bolivians across party, regional, and race lines favor nationalization.

The final dimension of this victimization culture involves the profound notion that indigenous Bolivians have been systematically excluded in social, political and economic terms for the past 500 years. In other words, despite the Revolution of 1952 and the democratization experience of the past two decades, the indigenous majority has been

⁶ Among the ironies of Bolivian political cycles is the prominent role that former President Sanchez de Lozada and his brother Antonio played in the military government that nationalized Gulf Oil.

purposely and systematically excluded. This arguable notion, based on the profound and lamentable reality of poverty and inequality, has become one of the legitimizing concepts of the current Morales administration. In contemporary Bolivia, the central premise of this legitimizing rhetoric is the idea that the colonial experience (internal and external) ended only in 2005 with the election of Evo Morales.

Nonetheless, the paradox in pre-2005 Bolivia was the indigenous question. Given Bolivia's large indigenous population, the State had always grappled with the incorporation of this sector. Since 1952, and as a result of agrarian reform, universal suffrage, the 1994 Popular Participation Law, and the 1995 Decentralization Law, Bolivians were self-congratulatory for successfully incorporating indigenous sectors, thus averting the problems of other countries with large indigenous populations such as Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru and Mexico.

The great tragedy of Bolivian democracy between 1985 and 2005 was that, despite sincere efforts to incorporate indigenous sectors into mainstream politics through the election of indigenous leaders to Congress, the vice-presidency, municipal governments, and the approval of important legislation, such as the Popular Participation Law (PPL), these were insufficient. Critical poverty, unemployment, and built-in exclusion resulted in two separate Bolivia's: one urban, white and the beneficiary of the process of democratization and economic reform, and another indigenous or mestizo, poor, urban and rural, and the indirect bearer of the costs of the economic development strategy.

This self-congratulatory sentiment was dashed at the turn of the century when Bolivia suddenly faced a conflict defined as a confrontation between the "pais politico" and the "pais profundo." In other words, Bolivia had managed to construct two countries: the first managed by the mestizo and middle class politicians under the rubric of democratization, and the second the more profound rural and indigenous country that felt excluded and angry. This moment was characterized by a number of simultaneous, often violent, and somewhat coordinated social insurrections that were successful in ending the reign of the complacent political parties that had governed Bolivia since 1985 and who had moved the country the closest it had ever gone toward liberal democracy and an

open-market-oriented economy. For most contemporary analysts, this period is arguably characterized as Bolivia's second great social revolution.

The politicians who governed Bolivia under what was termed a "pacted democracy" are seen today as a group of corrupt individuals who sacked the State and distributed jobs, contracts, and natural resource revenue among themselves and, who like the economic elite of the past, sold off the country's vast natural resources to foreign corporations, resources which included oil companies from Argentina, Brazil, the United States, and Europe.

Unlike previous confrontations, at the turn of the century, political conflict took on serious racial overtones that polarized the country. The evident winner of this confrontation is Evo Morales and his political movement, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS). As shall be analyzed below, Morales and his movement represent less the end of an old political system and more the next logical progression of Bolivian Strategic Culture.

Revolutionary Nationalism

The repeated losses of national territory to its neighbors is tied to the development of Bolivian Revolutionary Nationalism (NR), broadly defined as both a set of State-centered policy options and a mentality of nationalism, statism and profound distrust of the private sector and foreign investment. The anti-imperialist, anti-private enterprise, statist, and nationalist discourse became central to Bolivian politics, mainly as a result of the role played by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) before, during, and after the 1952 Revolution.⁷ RN is a central component of the MAS, the movement that provided President Morales with a political instrument to achieve power in 2005. In other words, the MAS, like all other contemporary political expressions in Bolivia, is also firmly rooted in the 1952 Revolution.⁸

For purposes of this essay, Revolutionary Nationalism represents the key dimension of Bolivian Strategic Culture. In the following paragraphs, an analysis of the

⁷ See Ivana Deheza, "Continuidad y Cambio en el Discurso Político en Bolivia: Impacto en la Cultura Estratégica," Paper presented at the ARC/FIU Workshop, January 14, 2010.

⁸ A similar contemporary interpretation can be found in Martin Brienens, *Interminable Revolution: Populism and Frustration in 20th Century Bolivia* SAIS Review - Volume 27, Number 1, Winter-Spring 2007, pp. 21-33.

MNR and the Revolution is presented to emphasize the striking parallels that exist between that moment and the current period under Evo Morales and the MAS. The assumption guiding the analysis presented in this section is that which ties both periods is Bolivian Strategic Culture.

The MNR-led Revolution of April 9, 1952 initiated an unparalleled process of political change in Bolivia. The major political change was the initiation of a hegemonic single-party regime that sought to simultaneously mobilize and control peasant and labor groups activated during the revolutionary upheaval.⁹ The MNR's leadership spoke of even more dramatic political restructuring, including the establishment of a worker's assembly and the enactment of a new constitution to institutionalize the revolution's gains. Both the MNR and its labor supporters aimed to supplement liberal democracy with a new corporatist and revolutionary logic.¹⁰

For comparative purposes, it is noteworthy that the MAS and Morales essentially argue for the same logic. In other words, the transformational change pursued by the government seeks to supplement the liberal democratic gains that Bolivia achieved between 1985 and 2005 with a so-called new indigenist and revolutionary logic. In the final analysis, both revolutionary transformations are linked by a corporatist Revolutionary Nationalism.

In 1952, apart from vital measures such as the nationalization of the tin mines and agrarian reform, the adoption of universal suffrage was the most significant act, as far as the development of a hegemonic party system was concerned. Universal suffrage helped to transform the MNR from a party of notables into a mass-based party. The challenge for the party was to channel and control the vote of the labor and peasant masses. The MNR was also forced to organize on a national basis, beyond a mere congressional presence. This was the first time that any political party developed structures outside of urban centers with the objective of organizing (and controlling) the campesino vote.

Since 2005, the MAS has developed along similar lines. In just a few years, it successfully organized itself as a national political structure; its initial and limited coca-

⁹Although the MNR monopolized governmental power, peripheral parties were allowed to exist but only as permitted by the official party.

¹⁰For an expansion of the analysis consult, James M. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution Op. Citi*. Part III.

grower base was transformed into a movement that transcends the agrarian sector and cemented its relations with labor and the middle class. Like the MNR, the strategy was to successfully coopt and control labor, indigenous sectors, the middle class, and even the armed forces. And, most important, Morales and the MAS have relied on the gains of liberal democracy and electoral processes to conduct their so-called Revolution in Democracy. In short, the MAS is the only party movement other than the MNR to have attained such a broad and deep national structure with the potential capacity to remain in power for a long period of time.

In the 1950s, because of its capacity to mobilize vast sectors of the peasantry, as well as the working and middle classes, the MNR became Bolivia's first modern mass-based party. The revolutionary process itself transformed the MNR from an organization dominated by a few notables into a mass-based party organization. By failing to adjust to mass-based politics, the MNR notables undermined the efforts of establishing a single-party dominant structure. Inspired by the Mexican revolution, the MNR leadership emulated the model of social control of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Like the PRI, the MNR rejected competitive pluralist democracy and sought to impose a state-centered system based on de facto single-party control operating behind the facade of democratic institutions and electoral procedures.

Like the MNR, Morales and his MAS also managed to quickly control Congress and the Judiciary, thus moving rapidly toward establishing almost complete political hegemony. And, like the MNR, the MAS is today a true mass-based party, somewhat removed from its cocalero past and its agrarian syndical leadership.¹¹

Like the MNR, Morales and his MAS control Congress and the Judiciary, thus moving rapidly toward establishing almost complete political hegemony. Unlike the MNR, the MAS successfully passed a new constitution and obtained a constitutional legitimacy that eluded the MNR and the Revolution. It is slightly more difficult to pinpoint the influences on the MAS. Its leadership and the mainly white middle-class ideologues that surround President Morales point to indigenous communalism as the

¹¹ This is the case, despite the fact that President Morales continues to serve as Secretary General of the Coca Growers Federation. As will be argued below, Morales's views of democracy are deeply rooted in a very vertical sense of democracy that have historically prevailed in Bolivian labor unions, including notions such as the "voto consigna" whereby the leadership defines how the labor mass is to vote unanimously on any given issue or for any chosen candidate.

main influence. Morales also credits the Marxist influence, mainly inspired by Cuba and Venezuela. Some leaders even acknowledge the importance of the 1952 Revolution, but no one traces the MAS to Revolutionary Nationalism and the MNR. The origins of the influence matter less than the continuity with Revolutionary Nationalism and its preference for a single-party hegemony legitimized by frequent electoral contests. The congruence between *movimientismo* of the 1950s and *masismo* of the 2000s reveals the centrality of Revolutionary Nationalism in the development of Bolivian Strategic Culture.

Additional comparisons with the MNR and the 1950s help to understand the centrality of RN to Bolivian Strategic Culture. In the 1950s, a number of obstacles stood in the way of the MNR's objective to transform Bolivia's political structure and establish its hegemony along the same lines achieved by the Mexican PRI. First, the MNR leadership, comprised mainly of middle-class lawyers such as Walter Guevara Arce, Victor Paz Estenssoro, and Hernan Siles Zuazo, feared demands for power from labor and its Trotskyist allies in the POR. They were also keenly aware of the broader implications of the revolution, especially Bolivia's reinsertion into the world economy. While MNR pragmatists such as Paz Estenssoro plotted State capitalist economic strategies to secure international recognition and support, they confronted antagonism from sectors of the labor movement who called for more radical anti-capitalist solutions.

Evo Morales is learning quickly that the radical discourse that catapulted him to power in 2005 is still useful to rally the masses and to win elections, but that to govern he must define Bolivia's reinsertion into the world economy. In five years, he masterfully crafted a strategy that convinced Bolivians that he nationalized hydrocarbons when in fact he simply changed the taxation scheme, transmitted the idea that he heads an indigenous government despite the visible reality that his cabinet includes few token indigenous ministers, and promoted nationalism while simultaneously involving both Cubans and Venezuelans in the decision-making process. This reality leads to the conclusion that the MNR in the 1950s was more profoundly committed to Revolutionary Nationalism than the contemporary MAS.

Other historical lessons can be derived from Bolivia's National Revolution, and the MAS should probably take note. During the 1950s, the MNR confronted one of Bolivia's structural realities, the dependent nature of its middle sectors. This reality was

exacerbated by the destruction of private sources of employment. As the party attempted to consolidate its grip over the Bolivian State, groups driven less by ideology and more by job factionalism exerted their demands on the MNR. From the outset, numerous factions, divided along personalistic lines, became visible. Each requested its share of either cabinet or other bureaucratic posts.

For the most part, their concerns centered on maintaining or restructuring clientelistic ties to party leaders. In the long run, factionalism undermined the MNR's desire to create a single-party State. Pressed by personalistic job-factional disputes, the MNR found it difficult to institutionalize a new political order. In a confused bid for legitimacy, the regime adopted the outline of the liberal democratic constitution of 1947. At the same time, the party organization, the role of the organized labor, and other reforms embraced corporatist concepts of State-society relationships. In 1961, a new constitution re-stated liberal principles while elevating to constitutional status revolutionary acts such as the nationalization of the tin mines, universal suffrage, and agrarian reform.

In short, one of the constants of Bolivian politics has been the conflict between those who are in power and those who demand a greater share of the patronage spoils from the outside. The contemporary period is not immune from this profound dynamic. The MNR failed to discover a formula to rotate patronage among competing factions; this failure contributed to the MNR's overthrow in 1964. In contemporary Bolivia, borrowing heavily from the Cuban and Venezuelan models of personalistic leadership, Evo Morales appears poised to run the country and his party indefinitely. At the same time, however, tensions are already showing, which hark back to the succession battles that led to the MNR's failure.

Again, it is instructive to examine the experience of the MNR with leadership succession. When Paz Estenssoro instituted a clause in the 1961 Constitution to allow his re-election, the implicit bargain to rotate the presidency and therefore patronage among the party notables was ruptured. With that, factional leaders began to look outside of the party for support in what became a tense inter-factional battle. Factionalism within the MNR linked into extra-party factional dynamics in opposition parties, class groupings and, most fatefully, the military. On November 4, 1964, a broad civil-military coalition

brought Paz Estenssoro down, and installed Air Force General René Barrientos Ortuño in the presidency. Although party factions helped oust Paz Estenssoro, the party as such was eclipsed in a new political game which came to pivot around the Bolivian armed forces.

This long explanation about the MNR's dilemmas and its resulting failure to conclude the Revolution it launched in 1952 serves as an important point of departure to examine the current "revolutionary" process in Bolivia under Morales and the MAS. While Morales holds a stronghold on the process, and will be the apparent leader for decades to come, in just five years, internal battles have already mirrored the internal disputes that brought down the MNR. As was the case with the MNR, the battles are less over ideological purity—although dissident sectors of the MAS argue that Morales has abandoned indigenism—and more over the distribution of patronage among key supporters. Job factionalism is quickly emerging as a central concern. As was the case in the 1950s, the realization is quickly setting in that with the assault on private initiatives, the State must provide jobs, especially for the new emerging mestizo and the indigenous middle classes.

An Incomplete State, Rent Seeking and Bolivian Strategic Culture

Bolivia, like other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, possesses an incomplete State characterized by a very weak institutional setting, little or no control over vast sectors of its national territory, an inability to enforce public policy uniformly, and a recurrent challenge to the legitimate monopoly over the use of force.¹²

For purposes of this essay, the Bolivian State has experienced at least four significant moments in which it faced its own temporal finitude; these were historical conjunctures when it came to the brink and miraculously pulled back from the precipice. Two such moments are tied to external wars with Chile and Paraguay. As was noted earlier, the Chaco War gave rise to an intense period of questioning that culminated with the 1952 Revolution when the stated objective was to destroy the old State and construct a new one.

The long military interlude that followed the Revolution can also be seen as a failed repetitive cycle in which soldiers and their civilian allies attempted to craft a new

¹² For a similar argument see, Eduardo A. Gamarra and Brian Fonseca, *Strategic Culture in Haiti*.

State. Their failure, and the failure more generally of authoritarian attempts to transform the State, led to its most severe crisis in the mid 1980s. At that particular moment, Bolivia defaulted into an attempt to reconstruct the State through a liberal representative democracy and market-oriented economic policies, generally described as “neoliberal.”

The crisis of the mid 1980s was profound, certainly deeper than the one faced at the beginning of the twenty-first century that brought Evo Morales to power. To begin, the economic crisis truly represented the end of long era of State-centered economic development. Not only was Bolivia unable to export minerals, but natural gas exports were incipient and still far from becoming the backbone of the economy. Most analyses of that period point to the dramatic annual hyperinflation rate of 26,000% achieved during 1984-85, as a symbol of this collapse.

In contrast, the so-called crisis of the middle of the present decade occurred just as the world commodity boom got underway. In contrast to both the Revolutionaries of the 1950s and the civilian politicians of the mid 1980s, Evo Morales inherited a booming economy that funded his most ambitious projects. And, at the same time, he developed a partnership with Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, who also provided assistance to Morales’s extravagant notions of refounding Bolivia.

Another important contrast is that, in the 1980s, defaulting into liberal democracy led to a curious and historically-brief period in which the authoritarian inclinations of the political class, the elite, and society were held in check by the temporary success of neoliberalism in ending hyperinflation and restoring economic growth. In a country where contradictions are prevalent, the neoliberal strategy contrasted deeply with the concrete patronage logic of the politicians who adroitly crafted a model that enabled the principal political parties to rotate in and out of government, and to share the patronage that the State provided.

These contradictions inevitably led to the final and most recent crisis of the State, which, as was noted, was rooted more in politics than in economics. The political pacts among politicians—which allowed for significant progressive and individual-centered reforms—were insufficient to resolve the demands from social sectors mobilized principally with a renewed nostalgia for a State-centered development strategy and

notions of the collective over the prevalence of individual rights that are championed by liberal democracy.

These broad observations must be placed into an historical context. In his classic study on the Bolivian Revolution, James Malloy argued that it was incomplete largely because it failed to transform the State and institutionalize the reforms of the 1950s.¹³ In the end, the MNR and the revolutionary leaders succumbed both to a military coup and to a more pragmatic need to reinsert Bolivia into the world economy. The notion of an incomplete revolution, however, explains the very nature of an incomplete State in Bolivia.

Over the course of its history, political actors in Bolivia have repeatedly re-founded the country, led coups and counter-coups, and proclaimed new nation-saving pacts. The 1952 Revolution and the current moment under Morales are emblematic of these efforts. In the end, while these historical moments transform the country in significant ways, the State remains incomplete; it is an unfinished project which in turn generates a new cycle of renewed re “foundational” promises.

Another characteristic of Bolivia’s incomplete State is the prevalence of political pacts between politicians, the elite, distinct social sectors, and the military. These pacts generally opt for authoritarian or quasi-authoritarian solutions aimed at consolidating political hegemony which is organized around networks to redistribute patronage (jobs, contracts, and natural resource revenue) among regime supports. In previous work on Bolivia, this pattern was described as neo-patrimonial, and was used mainly to describe the Banzer period (1971-1978).¹⁴ In retrospect, it is clear that the pattern transcends periods of military rule and explains the recurrent behavior among Bolivia’s ruling sectors.

This pattern also explains why authoritarianism has always been the first choice, and also why liberal democracy has also been a recurrent default mechanism. In short, when authoritarian pacts that form around the distribution of patronage, contracts and rents fail, Bolivia essentially defaults into liberal democratic moments. And, during these

¹³ James M. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968).

¹⁴ James M. Malloy and Eduardo Gamarra, *Revolution and Reaction: Bolivia 1964-1984* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988).

democratic interludes, political pacts also structured around the distribution of patronage, contracts and rents, also prevail. In previous work, I coined the term “pacted democracy” to describe the prevalent pattern during the 1985-2005 period.¹⁵

Along these same lines, Laserna convincingly argues that “rentism” is deeply embedded in Bolivian Strategic Culture.¹⁶

The explanation for an incomplete State in Bolivia can be found in the hypothesis that a true rentist pact exists between those who rule, the elite, and the best organized social groups who obviously rotate in and out of politics[,] but which in the long run do not modify the logic of this pact but which for the rest of the country functions more as a trap...The rentist pact is structured around the control and capture of the revenue (rent) generated by the production of hydrocarbons. Such pacts are possible only if revenues are generated and if the institutional setting is capable of concentrating them and at the same time sufficiently porous and malleable to allow their distribution to specific groups.¹⁷

To paraphrase Laserna, the success of pacts in either their authoritarian or liberal democratic versions, rests mainly on the reproduction of a legitimating political culture and in the exploitation of natural resources. The latter (natural resource production) is especially important because, when these dwindle or are exhausted, pacts collapse and new opportunities for the development of institutional reform and investment are created. Unfortunately, investment tends to dwell on past success and seeks to discover new

¹⁵ For an expansion of this analysis, see Eduardo A. Gamarra, “Hybrid Presidentialism and Democratization in Bolivia,” in Matthew Shugart and Scott Mainwaring, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Rent seeking is defined as behavior that seeks to maximize particular benefits, income, or benefits for individuals or groups through the exercise of direct political power or through influence on the decision-making process. Rent seekers use power and influence to obtain control or gain from existing wealth such as revenue or utility generated from the exploitation of natural resources. An additional feature of current tensions in Bolivia involves indigenous groups who believe that, since colonial times, the pattern of political and economic development served only to exclude them from the benefits derived from the export of the country’s natural resources. In the current context, indigenous communities in Bolivia have essentially drawn a line on hydrocarbons, arguing that they will not allow the country’s vast natural gas reserves to again be squandered in favor of the traditional elite and foreign investor.

¹⁷ Roberto Laserna, “Cultura Estrategica en Bolivia, La Fuerza del Pacto Rentista.” Paper presented at the ARC/FIU Workshop, January 14, 2010.

sources of natural resource wealth to generate wealth that then enables the opportunity for the development of a new ruling pact.

The resulting pacts are generally comprised of new groups (and survivors who are able to accommodate themselves to the moment), and a new elite which aims again to control and redistribute in clientelistic fashion patronage, contracts, and revenue among regime supporters. Even in moments like the ones that Morales and the MAS currently enjoy in Bolivia, the State remains incomplete and its institutions are extremely weak.

As Laserna notes, it is difficult to demonstrate that these pacts are formed deliberately or explicitly. “Frequently, its protagonists and principal actors pursue altruistic goals and fight against the prevalent pact even without clearly identifying it as such. The opportunities for power and the pressures that they bear absorb them in such a fashion that they tend to reproduce the same logic that they once fought against to avoid being displaced.”¹⁸ Finally, given the weakness of these pacts and the incomplete nature of the State, this recurrent characteristic makes Bolivia’s Strategic Culture vulnerable to political instability and even violent outcomes.

Radical Labor or Syndicalism and Bolivian Strategic Culture

Bolivian Strategic Culture is deeply rooted in the development of Bolivia’s labor unions, most of which are the product of the mining economy, the Chaco War, and the 1952 Revolution. The most significant expression of these labor unions was the miner’s federation (Federacion Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia-FSTMB), which was heavily influenced by revolutionary nationalism and by Trotskyite and Marxist thought. Since the 1940s, radical labor unions have confronted the State, seeking to obtain social gain through a myriad of strategies, ranging from strikes to outright rebellion.

These organizations gave life to notions of anti-imperialism, nationalization, and a rejection of private ownership of Bolivia’s natural resources. While they were representative of the miners who toiled in the mines, these unions were largely a reproduction of the authoritarian political culture that also embodied the revolutionary nationalist sectors that conducted the 1952 Revolution. The MNR was able to centralize Bolivia’s labor movement in a State-controlled confederation dubbed the Central Obrera

¹⁸ Laserna, Op.Cit.

Boliviana (COB). Between 1952 and 1985, the COB was able to mobilize distinct sectors of the working class against State policies, and managed to extract promises of worker co-government and co-management of State enterprises during the Revolution, and then again during the short-lived Siles Zuazo government (1982-1985).

As Toranzo explains in his essay on Bolivian Strategic Culture:

That nationalist revolutionary and Marxist syndicalism was born with: anti imperialist ideas; pro statist pulsations; anti entrepreneurial behavior; idealism linked to the defense of nationalizations; and ideas about social democratization. It was also born with a strong rejection of representative democracy and with friend-enemy logic aimed at eliminating the enemy[,] not understanding him as a rival with the objective of constructing their own State and hegemony.

Even under military rule, Bolivian organized labor was able to mobilize and challenge the myriad of colonels and generals who governed the country between 1964 and 1982. And, it was under military rule that peasant unions—another significant dimension of Bolivian syndicalism—emerged under the rubric of the Confederacion Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia.¹⁹

It is necessary, however, to understand the nature and the place of radical syndicalism in the development of Bolivian Strategic Culture, and its importance in the current context under Morales and the MAS. Toranzo's description provides an important set of clues.

Revolutionary syndicalism, which was radical in both ideology and daily practice, differed from traditional syndicalism[,] which mainly privileges the typical

¹⁹The entire history of agrarian labor unions is not analyzed for the sake of brevity. Suffice it to say that the MNR organized the countryside and party based unions were evident throughout Bolivia. In contrast to Conzelman, who argues that agrarian unions are rooted deeply in indigenous culture, most historians of Bolivian labor and the National Revolution point to the influence of the MNR and prerevolutionary syndicalism in the mining sector. It is also important to note that, for a decade following the overthrow of the MNR (1964-1974), campesino organizations were tied to the Armed Forces through a so-called Pacto Militar-Campesino that ended in 1974 as a result of the violent deaths of campesinos killed by government troops bent on putting down what was a simple protest of the Banzer government's economic policies. See, for example, James M. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968).

grievances such as better wages, shorter working hours, and labor rights. In Bolivia[,] radical syndicalism has always tended to supplant political parties, and often sees itself as a party and as the political vanguard. This is an idea that prevails to the present. For this reason the MAS is not a traditional political party; it is the sum of many unions and social organizations, which may even see themselves as a political party and which understand their tasks to be such. In other words, they see themselves as an organization with the principal task to control power and to construct a new state.

In other words, and as Toranzo argues: “The aims and objectives of syndicalism were to be obtained through force, by confronting power through social mobilization and the use of ‘street based politics[,]’ and not through the institutions of [liberal] democracy.” Thus, this meant appealing to strikes, hunger strikes, stoppages, demonstrations, road blockades, dynamiting infrastructure such as roads, hostage-taking, institutional takeovers, cutting of veins, burial of strikers, et cetera. This is the mobilization tradition of unions, social movements, NGOs and other societal actors who believe that the State ought to be pressured—and thus weakened—from any vantage point to give in to these pressures, so that they could proceed to take it over. In the popular imagery, the objectives are to be achieved through force not through dialogue or “concertation”; this is a valid approach for any type of policy, including security. Each strike, stoppage, or any social action was to be taken up to and including ‘final consequences’ and that did not imply peaceful or institutional roads.

The radical Bolivian labor-left movement suffered its greatest defeat in 1985, when the country experienced its worst economic crisis ever, which included an annual inflation rate of 26,000%. Bolivia’s president at the time, Victor Paz Estenssoro, was the founder of the MNR and the person who headed the National Revolution of 1952. This time around, however, Paz Estenssoro was responsible for implementing a set of far-reaching market-oriented economic reforms that dramatically ended nearly 35 years of State-led development. One of the principal victims of the measures was Bolivian organized labor, as free contracting was allowed, and the old COB was dramatically reduced in both size and importance. Within the COB, the most affected union was the

FSTMB, as thousands of miners were “relocated” when the tin mines were forced to close and the state mining corporation was dismantled.

In terms of the development of Bolivia’s Strategic Culture, the significance of the MNR in the 1950s and 60s in forging agrarian unions tied to the single-party structure is noteworthy. This tradition did not disappear with military rule, and it took an important detour in the democratization phase after 1985. Agrarian unions emerged, strengthened as a perverse result of the collapse of the mining sector and the demise of the FSTMB, once the backbone of Bolivian organized labor. It is not a mere coincidence—or solely the product of indigenous values and millenarian practices—that coca growers’ unions emerged in the Chapare Valley. These were organized in the direct image of the FSTMB: not only were former miners the new coca growers, but so their leaders were prominent leaders of the old mining unions such as Filemon Escobar, a self-declared mentor to president Evo Morales.

Contemporary accounts of agrarian unions, however, dismiss the roots in Bolivian revolutionary nationalism and the old left and argue that:

...Their leadership values are, in part, products of Bolivia’s unique agrarian community democracy system, called *sindicalismo*. Agrarian *sindicatos* were established throughout the Bolivian highlands following the Agrarian Reform initiative of 1953 by indigenous *campesinos*, in partnership with the state and political parties, to replace the feudal *hacienda* system and implement a model for community governance based on European labor syndicalism. Since then, this Western political model has been combined with Andean indigenous cultural values—such as reciprocity, consensus-building, rotation of leadership, and redistribution of resources—to form a stable system of rural community democracy. This system of community governance allows formerly disenfranchised indigenous people to not only run their own local governments, but also to voice their concerns and ideas to municipal, provincial, and federal

governments via a national sindicato hierarchy that terminates in the CSUTCB (Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia).²⁰

Conzelman's emphasis on community governance in some measure dismisses the overarching significance of revolutionary nationalism on the development of the illiberal democracy that characterizes Bolivia today.²¹

At the same time, this view of Bolivian syndicalism denies the centrality of the coca-cocaine complex that surrounds Evo Morales's movement and which has been significant in Bolivia since at least the mid 1970s.

Since the transition to democracy in the early 1980s, coca growers' unions have substantially grown in strength and remained active in politics. Although Morales was the first coca grower to win a single-member district seat in the lower house, the unions sent representatives to the legislature under different party tickets as early as 1982. Along with pushing for more representation in the central government, coca growers' union activism, characterized by road blockades, marches, and strikes, successfully resisted not only the imposition of US-funded eradication efforts, but also the government's neoliberal economic policies.

Coca farmers, displaced mine workers, military officers, traffickers, and political parties all participate in the illicit coca-cocaine economy. The growth of this immense and intricate complex, its concomitant web of corruption and joint Bolivian-US efforts to combat its proliferation, all taxed Bolivia's weak political system and had ramifications beyond a law enforcement or national security perspective.

²⁰ Caroline Conzelman, "Agrarian Sindicato Democracy and Evo Morales's New Coca Leaf Politics: An Anthropological Perspective on Bolivian Strategic Culture," paper presented at the Workshop on Strategic Culture, ARC/FIU January 14, 2010. For a historians perspective see Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thompson, *Revolutionary Horizons: Past and Present in Bolivian Politics* (London: Verso, 2007). While these authors identify a relationship between indigenous culture and revolutionary nationalism, they place greater weight on the influence of indigenism on Bolivia's contemporary "democratic" culture.

²¹ Definitions of Illiberal democracy abound. In this essay the term refers to a regime where elections prevail in the context of deliberate and even legal limited political pluralism. For a good discussion of the term, see Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," in *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1997. Zakaria was prescient in arguing that throughout the world democracy without constitutional liberalism was producing centralized regimes, the erosion of liberty, ethnic competition, conflict, and war. This is an apt description of Bolivia under Morales. For another prescient article see, Guillermo O'Donnell's classic "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (January 1994): 55-69.

Coca-cocaine production dramatically affected social, economic, and political dynamics throughout Bolivia. The major roadway connecting eastern and western Bolivia runs through the geographically central, coca-producing Chapare region. Coca growers there were able to disrupt politics and commerce by blocking exports and the flow of goods from one side of the country to the other. This simple tactic gave Evo Morales and the Chapare Unions an inordinate amount of power that was subsequently channeled in a nationwide effort to bring down liberal democracy.

The various actors that take part in Bolivia's coca-cocaine complex were a critical element of support in Morales's rise to power. Even after his inauguration as president of Bolivia, Morales did not abandon his role as coca union leader. Morales may now be a national leader with widespread support, but the coca growers will always be a praetorian guard he can mobilize to obtain specific gains.

This sidebar into the coca-cocaine complex illustrates a basic reality of democracy in contemporary Bolivia. Morales understands democracy from the perspective of a labor leader rooted in the complex history of mining and, more recently, coca growing. This type of syndical democracy is about discipline, unanimous voting, and support for elected leaders. Dissent is not generally tolerated and opposition is perceived as a conspiracy against the project for change designed by Morales and his followers.

These lead to one final observation. Bolivian Strategic Culture fits comfortably within the confines of contemporary definitions of illiberal democracy. Given the overwhelming importance of syndicalism, liberal democracy has been difficult to institutionalize in a political culture that expresses high support for democracy and defines Bolivia as "plurinational," and simultaneously reveals very high levels of intolerance by enforcing limited political pluralism. This is, of course, not a new but a recurrent phenomenon in Bolivia and has had both civilian and military expressions throughout history. It is in this sense that the Morales period should be understood less as something unique, innovative, and profoundly democratic (or undemocratic) and more as something rooted in a Strategic Culture that favors the consolidation of corporatist and authoritarian regimes.

In sum, and again paraphrasing Toranzo: “Over the past 70 years, the political culture of the left, the popular movements, and working sectors has been marked by the syndical culture of the mining movement, which saw itself as a party with the objective of creating its own State. Cocalero syndicalism and the MAS have organized in the same manner and following the model of mining syndicalism.”

Caudillos: Barbarous and Lettered

Bolivian Strategic Culture is largely defined by significance of several strong men whose role determined the course of history and influenced political culture and recurrent political practice. For some authors, that independence from Spain was forged by men on horseback who played a decisive role in legitimizing irregular and illegitimate changes of government. Strong men on horseback in the 1800s became men in helicopters in the 1960s and indigenous contemporary saviors bent on changing the rules to suit their particular and sometimes peculiar political ambitions.

Bolivians are taught to revere Marshall Andres de Santa Cruz Calaumana, arguably the first indigenous president, who showed great military strategy in combating reunification with Peru, but who had little understanding of economic development. Even Carlos Mesa, a recent prominent and well-educated president with his own aspirations to caudillismo, expressed great admiration for nineteenth-century leaders such as Andres de Santa Cruz.

At the same time, Bolivians revere “good” caudillos like General Isidoro Belzu, described in history books as the protector of the indigenous masses. And, Bolivian history books are riddled with legendary descriptions of General Mariano Melgarejo, a barely literate mestizo, whose exploits and antics are said to have caused Queen Victoria of England to erase Bolivia from the map in the 1860s after she learned that her navy could not bomb cities in the highlands. Occasionally, civilian caudillos of the 1880s are also celebrated: they are described as literate, European educated, and brilliant. But less is known of these lettered caudillos, probably because they could not compete with the antics of a Melgarejo.

In the 1900s, the pattern of reverence for caudillo rule continued. In the 1920s, strong men like Juan Bautista Saavedra were both popular and arbitrary. Paying little

heed to institutions and or laws, this lawyer, historian, and experienced politician ended one of the longest periods of civilian and democratic rule by staging a coup and then arbitrarily convoking a Constituent Assembly to change the constitution to meet his vision of a modern Bolivia.²² While his repressive government ended as abruptly as it began in the mid 1920s, the pattern was set for the rest of the century.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, military officers who trained in fascist Italy achieved political power and set in motion a more modern version of caudillismo. The best know was Colonel Gualberto Villarroel, who is long remembered for claiming that he “was not an enemy of the rich, just more of a friend of the poor.” Villarroel’s short-lived period in office ended violently, as he and two of his supporters were hanged from lampposts across the street from the presidential palace by a mob of university students who were allegedly financed and mobilized by conservative political sectors who feared for their property and wealth.

The mid-century revolution of 1952, headed by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR), was also conducted by civilian caudillos, including Victor Paz Estenssoro, Hernan Siles Zuazo, Walter Guevara Arze and Juan Lechin Oquendo. This pattern was followed by military caudillos of all types. Air Force General Rene Barrientos Ortuno, who overthrew the MNR in 1964, spoke Quecha to the indigenous masses of his hometown of Tarata, Cochabamba, and flew around the country in helicopters to demonstrate his bravado. Even General Hugo Banzer Suarez, who governed the country between 1971 and 1978, was able to transcend his years as dictator and emerge as a democratic political party leader in the 1980s and 1990s. He would go on to be elected president in 1997.

Like Banzer, even the liberal democratic period (1982-2005) gave rise to a set of lettered caudillos such as Victor Paz Estenssoro, Jaime Paz Zamora, and even Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada. This period also gave rise to Evo Morales, the most important caudillo since the 1950s. In short, Strategic Culture in Bolivia is rooted in the recurrent emergence of caudillos of all types, educated and literate and others with less-formal instruction but equally (or maybe even more) appealing to the Bolivian masses.

²² Bautista Saavedra wrote three well-known books before achieving political power: *Ayllú, Estudios sociológicos sobre América* (1914), *El litigio Perú-boliviano* (1916) and *La democracia en nuestra historia* (1917).

Evo Morales must be understood in this context. In this sense, it is a mistake to view him and his movement as peculiar or even exceptional. This entire exercise reveals that the current moment is grounded firmly in several recurrent patterns and themes in Bolivian history.

Regionalism

A final dimension influencing Bolivian Strategic Culture concerns the profound regional divisions that have plagued national unity and the very formation of the national State. With the exception of the central government, which grew disproportionately in size to meet the employment needs of the middle class, the State has had virtually no control over its national territory, and has struggled with attempts to impose authority in remote and not so remote corners of the country.

The vastness of the territory and the inadequacy of institutions and resources made it a virtual impossibility for the State to control the country's geography. To add to this weakness, the country has always been plagued by profound regional tensions pitting the eastern lowlands against the highlanders. Separatist aspirations have always been attributed to lowlanders from Santa Cruz, whom many accuse of secretly wishing to be annexed by Brazil. While these regional autonomy disputes are present in other Latin American settings, in Bolivia the ethnic and racial divide that dovetails regional conflicts adds to the inability of the State to effectively govern the country's vast territory.

Against this backdrop, a very intense process of inter-regional rivalry to control national policy and resources unfolded as regional "civic committees" moved to advance local interests. During the 1952 Revolution and then under military rule, the State sponsored an eastward expansion away from the Altiplano Highlands. The eastward expansion included an economic diversification from traditional mining to hydrocarbons. By the late 1970s, Santa Cruz had already become the second most important city in Bolivia, yet it remained outside of major decision making. Despite the importance of Santa Cruz, in economic terms, most decisions affecting Bolivia's interior were still being taken by a political apparatus centered in the capital city of La Paz. This pattern was not significantly altered, even by the transition to liberal democracy and neoliberalism in the 1980s. It is probably more accurate to argue that, despite efforts to

decentralize decision making through policies such as the Popular Participation Law of the mid 1990s, the concentration of decision-making authority in La Paz remained deeply ingrained in the mindset of those who have ruled Bolivia since the 1950s.

Consequently, the regionally-based conflict between the Altiplano Highlands and the lowlands was exacerbated by civilian, military, populist, and anti-populist rulers alike. The regional conflict, which did not begin with the revolution, was partially based on race. The lowland *Camba* considered himself white and superior to the *Kolla* mestizo and Indian[s] from the highlands. The conflict renewed separatist sentiments from Santa Cruz. It also demonstrated the inherent weakness of the Bolivian State.

In the past, regional conflict was mediated by central authoritarian rulers. During the crisis of the mid 1980s, however, the perceived absence of central authority, the eastern lowlands emerged as a major power contender. Led by the powerful Santa Cruz Civic Committee, regional pressure was exerted for a greater role in national political life. These demands culminated with the drive toward administrative decentralization—enshrined in the 2009 Constitution—that posits regional and indigenous autonomy as a major premise.

Throughout the liberal democratic period, civic committees effectively supplanted political parties as the articulators and aggregators of regional interests. Political parties were singularly incapable of channeling the regional demands, mainly because legislators were not selected on the basis of ties to constituencies in the regions they ostensibly represent but on the basis of clientelistic bonds with party leaders.

Between 2003 and 2005, this situation reached its most severe crisis in the midst of the social and regional mobilizations against the Sanchez de Lozada and Mesa governments. In Santa Cruz elite sectors, including the Civic Committee, business associations, the Mayor and the Prefect launched a movement for departmental autonomy. In January 2005, pro-autonomy groups mobilized 500,000 people, demanding that the Mesa government convoke a binding referendum on the question of regional autonomy. The government gave in and agreed that the referendum would be held on July 2, 2006, the same date scheduled for the election of a Constituent Assembly demanded by highland indigenous groups. In the end, 57 percent of voters opposed granting regional authorities more autonomy. Only four out of Bolivia's nine states voted

in favor of increased political and economic independence: Santa Cruz, Tarija, Pando, and Beni, the resource-rich parts of the country.

Despite the outcome of the referendum and subsequent political events, including the passage of a new constitution and crumbling of regionally-based pro-autonomy movements, any analysis of the current Morales government must closely examine the significance of these regional factors. Under Morales, disputes over land ownership, control of natural resources, the role of the central government, and ethno-cultural identity exacerbated demands for autonomy from Santa Cruz that quickly grew into a five-department movement that challenged both Evo and the preeminence of La Paz over the entire political apparatus and the decision-making process.

This regional conflict, in addition to the ethnic and racial divides in Bolivia, contributed to a crisis of political legitimacy, weakened the State's ability to effectively govern the country's territory, and produced even more constituencies unhappy with the traditional elites in La Paz—fertile ground for coalition building by the MAS.

At issue and central to the debate is the demand from those regions for increased control over the collection and spending of revenues derived from their land and natural resources. Although decentralization efforts have already vastly increased the size of public funds for those states, local authorities remained profoundly unsatisfied.

President Morales was able to dismantle the political structures and movements that emerged over the course of the past two decades. It is likely that, in the very near future (elections for Mayors, local assemblies, and governors), he will hand the regional opposition its final defeat. By soundly defeating the Santa Cruz elite and its supporters, Morales believes that he will have maintained national unity and preserved access to the energy resources in those department that sustain the Bolivian economy.

This victory, however, has only temporarily stymied regional forces. And, it is likely that if any real organized opposition ever emerges to Morales, it will probably include a significant regional component. The reasons are obvious. Morales's government, like those of the past, is unwilling to relinquish any central decision-making power to the regions. In sum, this regional tension may be underground, but it will remain latent and will re-emerge in the future as one of the central dilemmas of Bolivia's Strategic Culture.

Challenges, Risks and Opportunities

This long discussion of the origins and keepers of Strategic Culture leads to the conclusion that Bolivia is once again at a crossroads it has been at before: refounding itself under new leadership with a hegemonic project that has the potential to remain in place for many years. In this sense, this Findings Report disagrees with most contemporary interpretations of the current process in Bolivia, who see it as something new, unique and profoundly democratic. The discussion provided in this essay reveals just how historically and structurally-grounded this project is, and how likely it is to inevitably fall victim to its own trappings.

More important, this discussion leads to a final observation that Morales and his movement are more firmly rooted in Bolivian Strategic Culture than those few liberal democratic leaders who presided over exceptional moments of representative democracy. In other words, Bolivian Strategic Culture inevitably facilitates and supports the emergence of authoritarian and quasi-authoritarian rulers.

Like other experiments of this nature Morales and his MAS have legitimized their rule through an extensive reliance on the instruments of liberal democracy—especially periodic elections and a new constitution sprinkled with individual rights. Simultaneously, however, the constitution and the logic of the entire process is to achieve what previous similar experiments failed to do, i.e. blend in a workable fashion individual rights with notions of communal rights and responsibilities. Bolivia's complex history reveals that corporatist designs inevitably prevail. Beyond the constitutional niceties, individual rights succumb to the leader, the movement, and the political trappings of any given moment.

So, in the final analysis, what does all of this mean for Bolivia's future? At best it means that Morales will govern for years to come but will do so in increasingly authoritarian fashion not only because the rigors of the moment will lead him to want greater executive authority to carry out his designs for "change," but also because his conception of democracy is mainly based on his own syndicalist past. If the past is prologue, then Bolivia's pattern of instability is likely to repeat itself. President Morales's success over the long term will be determined less by landslide electoral victories.

Instead, he will face the age-old challenges of maintaining “rentist” pacts that will require him to effectively handle the rotation of patronage, contracts, and natural resource revenues among his supporters and those who will want entry into the system. Bolivian history is laced with failed experiments to manage these arrangements over the long term.

About the Author

Eduardo A. Gamarra received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Pittsburgh in 1987. He has been affiliated with Florida International University since 1986 and he is the former director of the Latin American and Caribbean Center, professor of political science, and the editor of *Hemisphere*, a magazine on Latin American and Caribbean affairs. He is the author, co-author, and editor of several books including *Revolution and Reaction: Bolivia 1964-1985* (Transaction Publishers, 1988); three volumes of the *Latin America and Caribbean Contemporary Record* (Holmes and Meier Press); *Latin American Political Economy in the Age of Neoliberal Reform* (Lyne Rienner Publishers 1994); *Democracy Markets and Structural Reform in Latin America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico* (Lyne Rienner Publishers, 1995); and *Entre la Droga y la Democracia* (Freiderich Ebert Foundation, 1994). The author of over fifty articles on Latin America and the Caribbean, he has testified in the US Congress on drug policy toward Latin America.

Over the course of the last fifteen years, Dr. Gamarra has been a consultant to multilateral agencies, the Library of Congress, foundations, and government agencies throughout the hemisphere. He has lectured on issues ranging from narcotics trafficking and US Latin American policy to democratization and structural reform at universities throughout the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Europe. He has been quoted in various periodicals ranging from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* to *El Tiempo de Bogota*, *El Mercurio de Chile*, and *La Razon de La Paz*, Bolivia. His current research focuses on the political economy of narcotics trafficking, problems of democratization, and civil-military relations in the Andean region and the Caribbean. Most recently, Dr. Gamarra has been working on US policy toward Colombia and is directing a project on the Colombian migration to the United States.

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Findings Report 1-Venezuela (July 2009)
Findings Report 2 – Cuba (August 2009)
Findings Report 3 – Haiti (September 2009)
Findings Report 4 – Colombia (October 2009)
Findings Report 5 - Brazil (November 2009)
Findings Report 6 - Ecuador (January 2009)
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