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DEMOCRACY AND BOLIVIAN SOVEREIGNTY IN THE MORALES ERA

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ABSTRACT

In late 2019, Evo Morales was forced out of office as the President of Bolivia and charged with sedition and terrorism. Morales had spent more than two decades as an indigenous and *cocalero* activist, then served as President for nearly fourteen years. During this time, he and the Bolivian Movement Toward Socialism party, the MAS, oversaw a new constitution with the goals of supporting Bolivian sovereignty and democratic ideals. Morales's version of democracy, though, is intertwined with sovereignty, and centered on increasing the rights of the indigenous peoples who brought him to notoriety. This paper seeks to determine the extent to which Morales succeeded based on a sampling of policies put into place during his tenure. These evaluations will demonstrate that while Bolivian systems have moved toward democracy and national sovereignty under Morales, his own actions undermined that progress. Morales's commitment to his indigenous identity and vision of himself as an indigenous leader caused him to work against his own stated aims of democracy and sovereignty.

In 2006, after a successful campaign touting his indigenous roots and *cocalero* background, Evo Morales took office as the Bolivian President. Morales was aligned with the Bolivian Movement Toward Socialism party, the MAS. The primary goals of both the MAS and his presidency were improving indigenous conditions and reducing reliance on the United States. Over his tenure, these very same goals would lead Morales to enforce unpopular policies and the once-popular leader lost strength. Further costing him the favor of his citizens, Morales refused to step down based on the new constitution he helped install, and complaints of voter fraud grew rampant. In late 2019, he was forced out of office and charged with sedition and terrorism. After the fall of Morales, world powers including the US and UK have shown support for Jeanine Añez as the new president of Bolivia, suggesting that Morales's efforts at establishing Bolivian sovereignty may be a thing of the past, but its democracy appears safe.

This paper will examine Morales's policies during his presidency to determine the extent to which they (1) support Bolivian sovereignty and (2) support democratic ideals. Based on these policies, Morales's record on multiple issues will be evaluated: indigenous rights, coca production, land use, resource nationalism, and foreign involvement. These evaluations will demonstrate that while Bolivian systems have moved toward democracy and national sovereignty under Morales, his own actions undermined that progress. Over the course of his presidency, Morales's understanding of principles of democracy and sovereignty based in his indigenous identity caused him to stray from the true meanings.

In order to support this thesis and analyze how successfully Morales supported Bolivian sovereignty and democracy, it is first important to define the elements of democracy for the purposes of this analysis. Since the revolution of 1952, myriad Bolivian leaders have worked toward democracy in the nation. Henry Veltmeyer and Juan Tellez's history of Bolivian politics explain the country's trajectory in the years before Morales rose to power:

The transition toward democracy in Bolivia has been characterized above all by the search for a new economic, social, and institutional order... each political party and social organization engaged in the battle for democracy had a different view, and vantage point, even a different concept of democracy. But, notwithstanding this ideological diversity, there was a general consensus as to the need to reform and modernize the state.¹

The first of two key elements of Morales's term, and this essay, is Bolivia's progress toward democracy under his leadership. To evaluate Morales's commitment to democracy in Bolivia, the guide will be the criteria Scott Mainwaring establishes for evaluating Latin American democracies: (1) political offices resulting from competitive elections, (2) broad adult suffrage, and (3) respect for civil liberties along with the protection of minority rights.²

Bolivia established universal suffrage in 1952, but the new constitution of 2009 provides an opportunity to examine weak spots and how Morales tried to safeguard suffrage and minority rights. A major part of Morales's platform centers around indigenous rights and tracking changing attitudes during his terms in office will demonstrate his commitment to democracy. Morales was a player in elections in Bolivia from 2002-2019, so the events leading up to the 2005 election will also provide important context for this analysis.

The second key element of this analysis is establishing Bolivian sovereignty. For Morales, Bolivian sovereignty is rooted in reducing foreign influence in the country, reducing power of the large estates in favor of individuals, and ensuring sustainable development. To achieve the MAS's desired "Honourable, Sovereign and Productive Bolivia for Living Well," Bolivia needed to reduce the presence of oil companies by nationalizing the industry;³ create and sustain "productive development . . . for the eradication of poverty";⁴ protect Bolivian land for Bolivian farmers and ensure those farmers can provide food for the country "so as not to depend on donations."⁵ Beyond the party platform, Morales's statements before he took office demand change: a new constitution with natural resources "in the hands of the Bolivian people" and a desire to "'de-neo-liberalize' all basic services."⁶

Morales's rise can be characterized as part of a grassroots indigenous movement, but this paper will examine how it continues from a top-down position. His popularity with the people was evident in the year prior to his inauguration, and long before: "His image appeared on all campaign propaganda and in some cases the words 'Evo Presidente' dwarfed the name of the party itself."⁷ As he took office, "the movement is top-heavy, its power concentrated in its leader."⁸ Morales claims to be a representative of the bottom, but a linear approach will demonstrate that his policies maintained this top-heavy approach, further concentrating his own power with a new constitution and his ultimate attempts to dismiss the provisions that tried to reign him in. Overall, this paper will show how Morales's policies caused Morales's declining popularity and resulting efforts to maintain power.

Examination of the arguments from the groups silenced in this environment will also be a key element of analysis. Morales is often painted broadly, either as just another radical left-wing

populist by detractors or fawningly without significant analysis by his supporters. “Many analysts have heedlessly replaced careful examinations of empirical reality with casual celebration of press releases issued from the presidential palace of Evo Morales.”⁹ For instance, in “A Populism of Indignites,” Marten Brienen argues that Morales’ popular public speeches do not necessarily reflect his actual policies: “While he has talked at length about socialism and railed against capitalism, no significant reforms of the economic system—such as significant income redistribution—have been proposed, let alone implemented, under his administration.”¹⁰ This insight on the difference between Morales’s speeches and his actions can be seen throughout his presidency.

BACKGROUND

Evo Morales has created a powerful image of himself as a man of the people, focusing on his humble origins. Indigenous and *cocalero* are two words never far from his name, and it seems that any piece seeking to tie them into his policies would be remiss to not include a reference to his fashion choices. Like the missing necktie and occasional football jersey, it is the reality of this life that informs his policies: nationalization of natural resources, land redistribution, protected coca production, and reducing foreign dependence to promote wealth inside Bolivia.

Juan Evo Morales Ayma was born in rural western Bolivia in October 1959. His family were poor, Aymaran subsistence farmers in an area rich in indigenous tradition and customs, including the communal ayllu.¹¹ He attended secondary school but did not finish, and did not attend university, instead serving in the army. His service coincided with a time of instability in Bolivia, with five presidents in two years, including two military coups. After his service, storms destroyed much of their land.¹² He and his family left their ancestral home on the Antiplano and settled in Chapare, in the Tropic of Cochabamba, to expand beyond subsistence farming, purchasing land for a fruit farm that eventually transitioned into coca production.¹³

The land in the Chapare region offered titled lands under control of a local *sindicato*. Once a tool of land distribution, the coca boom in the latter twentieth century and subsequent migrant influx expanded the organization’s role. The migrant influence resulted in a union-like, quasi-government structure responsible for local *sindicatos*’s organization, crop diversity, education, infrastructure, socialization, and other local government tasks.¹⁴ In order to possess a title, Morales had to join the *sindicato*.¹⁵ Morales’s first post within the organization came several years later in 1983, when he parleyed his interest in football into a position as secretary of sports. He rose up quickly: he was elected *sindicato* leader in 1985 and became a *federación* leader in 1988, at just 29 years old.¹⁶

From 1988 to 2005, Morales fought for *campesinos* rights in the Bolivian Congress and through the MAS. He was jailed several times for his activism and rose to prominence, the result of which included a surprisingly successful second place showing in the 2002 presidential election. During this time, Morales proved himself dedicated to the *campesinos* and their causes, unwilling to align himself with other parties. Biographer Martin Sivak explains that through his travels Morales became convinced that “*campesinos* would vote *campesino*” in Bolivian elections, which justified his loyalty to their cause.¹⁷ He drew the attention of national figures and international governments, leading to increased “democracy promotion” by the United States, who courted several other parties and potential leaders over concerns about the rise of Morales and the MAS.¹⁸

Morales's 2005 victory was dependent upon a broad base of support from the indigenous, the *campesinos*, and workers; he and MAS earned support by promoting their rights. These supporting groups had long felt suppressed by Bolivian policies, and MAS provided an *instrumento político* to channel their power. Morales referred to his position as a leader for indigenous Bolivians in his inaugural address, saying "We have been condemned, humiliated ... and never recognised as human beings," as well as "We are here and we say that we have achieved power to end the injustice, the inequality and oppression that we have lived under."¹⁹ Morales's identity as a man and a politician is as much a product of his heritage as it is his history, a "fluid relationship between the class and indigenous identity."²⁰ These groups "shared a common hostile view of western globalization, capitalism, and neoliberalism, but lacked any larger representation before the emergence of MAS."²¹

Evo was born several years after the 1952 Revolution expanded constitutional rights to include universal suffrage, but the rural setting in his formative years meant that "the health policies of the 1952 Revolution, which also brought universal suffrage, nationalization of the mining industry, and agrarian reform, never made their way out to those confines. Neither did electricity, gas, or drinking water."²² The injustice of life as a poor farmer, and later a *cocalero*, formed the heart of his policies during all of his time in office.

Farming has also influenced his views on Bolivian sovereignty. Upon arriving in the tropic, the family also took part in a larger deforestation in order to turn their plot into arable land. That plot was large enough to sustain fruit farming. In his 2011 book *Evo Morales and the MAS*, Sven Harten argues that "[Morales's] experience in the fertile yet commercially underexploited Tropic nevertheless comes to the surface in his economic policy when he talks about the ability of small-scale farmers to make Bolivia self-sufficient in food."²³ Supporting small *campesinos* rather than commercial farmers reflects his own background.

The direct democracy at work in the *sindicato* informed Morales's leadership style as well. These meetings, where any member can express an opinion before the whole group comes to a consensus, both trained and influenced Morales. One goal of the meetings were the "facilitation of communication between leaders and the grassroots... an essential prerequisite of making informed decisions," and one he continued by meeting regularly with grassroots organizations.²⁴ Meetings in this style also gave him the ability to speak persuasively to those who may not agree with him.²⁵ However, this system can also be viewed in a less positive light; these meetings can look like "consultations" that result in "both clientelism and favouritism."²⁶

Looking at Morales's terms of success for himself are an important indicator of what is guiding him. In the *sindicato*, leaders are judged by "how well they generate consensus, articulate the views of the grassroots at other levels, and facilitate communication with other organizations."²⁷ Even upon leaving office in 2019, Morales expressed an attitude similar to that of a potential *sindicato* leader in stubbornly justifying his actions: "I did not look for the candidacy. . . The organisations of the popular struggle asked me to be the candidate."²⁸

Evo Morales ran for President in 2005 as the Movement Toward Socialism candidate. He was part of a broader movement of left-leaning candidates that made up the South American "pink tide" of the early twenty-first century. On election day in December 2005, nearly 85 percent of the population voted and gave Evo Morales a popular mandate.²⁹ Predictably, the MAS had widespread success in the countryside, but they also appealed to "the informal urban proletariat of the suburban slums and older working-class barrios of the major urban centers."³⁰ This broad base

led to 53.7 percent of the vote for Morales, a thirty-point increase over his total in the 2002 election, and the first absolute majority in a presidential election in more than forty years—but did not quite hit his own goal of 60 percent.³¹

Often missing from this success story is a mention of the role that Morales played in the unrest in the half decade before he took office. With a goal of "the refounding of Bolivia, [and] the transformation of the economic model and political system," he called for significant changes to the Bolivian system that would require immediate action as a leader.³² His platform proclaims a commitment to the country and its resources: "The time has come to change this terrible history of looting our natural resources, of discrimination, of humiliation, of hate, of despise."³³ Positions like this made him a popular candidate, one with his finger on the pulse of the Bolivian people.

No one can deny Morales's charisma—talk of "Evoism" was already heard in 2007.³⁴ The danger of a cult of personality can have ramifications for the country's politics, though. Marten Brienens argues that the populist elements that allowed Morales' meteoric rise are the same elements undermining his government. He points out that popular ideas may not consider the reality or the best interests of the **state**, and summarizes that "popular power, then, is a double-edged sword in Bolivian politics: while it has allowed the marginalized a political voice, it has also served to undermine the political stability the country needs for long-term growth."³⁵ Combining the pro-Evo attitudes of Bolivians with the populist leanings of a new leader had the potential for serious political ramifications.

2006 HYDROCARBON "NATIONALISM" AND RESOURCE NATIONALISM

Coming off a half-decade of conflict over national resources, Morales's swift movement on nationalizing hydrocarbons is unsurprising. On May 1, 2006, Morales issued Supreme Decree No. 28701 and took control of the country's oil and gas fields. In announcing the move, he proclaimed, "the time has come, the awaited day, a historic day in which Bolivia retakes absolute control of our natural resources...The looting by the foreign companies has ended."³⁶ This is an early example of the difference between Morales's hardline rhetoric as an activist that was tamed by the realities of the presidency. In late 2005, he claimed that "the state is under an obligation to have total control over the hydrocarbons, and that includes a political position, commanding respect for the constitution and the struggle of the Bolivian people."³⁷ However, his decree stopped short of expropriation; Morales instead imposed a 180-day deadline for foreign companies to renegotiate their contract or leave.³⁸ Despite protests from the corporations and countries impacted, many chose to meet Bolivia's demands.³⁹

The issue that emerges from Decree No. 28701 is Bolivia's resource nationalism. Brienens describes this concept as "rooted in the imagery of the 'beggar on a throne of gold.'"⁴⁰ Morales's explanation of poverty in the midst of natural wealth is supported by the poverty facing many in Bolivia—64 percent when he took office.⁴¹ In 2005, he pointed out that "Many families still cook with . . . wood, with hay. This is absurd and unjust."⁴² He later made clear his belief that Bolivians should be prioritized, stating that "the Bolivian people cannot live on top of gas but without gas . . . our domestic market will be supplied with cheap gas."⁴³ This people-first stance drove the hydrocarbon decree, and gives support to Morales's conception of ruling in the name of the people.

Many of Morales's biographers, and those evaluating his actions in real time, emphasize his connection with his background while reporting his actions as leader, essentially framing a top-down narrative as a time of success for those on the bottom. The 2005 election and this policy are

two early examples of Morales's success framed as indigenous success. Recognizing this dichotomy is necessary to understand analysis of the former President.

In their article "Performing Indigeneity in Bolivia," Nicole Fabricant and Nancy Postero explain that "in contrast to the long history of natural resource extraction—first by the Spanish conquistadors, then by white-mestizo elite, and finally by transnational corporations—the MAS state promises to construct a new form of justice based on redistribution of resource wealth to the indigenous and poor."⁴⁴ Morales blames colonialism and foreign interests for the condition of his constituents, with the foreign looting of natural resources a continuation of Latin America's "open vein."⁴⁵ Reversing this trend was key to his understanding of his mandate, and supports Pevehouse's findings on the democratic nature of leaders who have risen from regional organizations. Morales had significant support from the *cocaleros* and faced potentially high "audience costs" for not following through on his promises—resulting in rapid action on at least one campaign promise.⁴⁶

Historians also recognize the more complicated economic issues at play in Bolivia. Brienen, for instance, does not argue that exploitation is *not* a factor, but does point out that hydrocarbons alone are not the answer to Bolivian poverty.⁴⁷ Taking over the gas and oil reserves brought a significant amount of land and money into the hands of the state—based on a global increase in commodity prices.⁴⁸ This provided an opportunity for Morales to increase his own power at the expense of Bolivia's democracy, which would be in line with Jan Teorell's characterization of "the anti-democratic effect of natural resource abundance" in his *Determinants of Democracy*.⁴⁹

Though there have been questions of his handling of the state lands (see below), overall Morales has avoided the lure of the "rentier state" and worked with the private sector and transnational corporations to do the extraction that Bolivia does not have the resources for.⁵⁰ With increased value of Bolivian hydrocarbons, the government had money to spend on the poorest citizens.⁵¹ The result is economic stability and popular support for his 2009 and 2014 elections, despite widespread criticism.⁵²

Even with competitive elections in Bolivia, the structure of the government meant that Morales often governed by decree—as he did with hydrocarbons. As outlined above, historians see this early action as in line with popular thought. Based on the popular desire underlying the decree Morales issued, this decision does demonstrate progress toward democracy. The hydrocarbon decree and early actions on national resources also support his desire for Bolivian sovereignty. Though he did not fully remove transnational corporations and foreign influence, he did force recertification of the business terms in a way that would keep the majority of profits in Bolivia. Overall, he made progress toward reducing dependence and ensuring Bolivian sustainability.

2009 CONSTITUTION, INDIGENOUS IDENTITY, AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Another key of Morales's activism was the creation of a new constitution, one which would highlight the power of the people as the owners of natural resources and beneficiaries of state wealth.⁵³ After making progress on hydrocarbon nationalization, he began quickly with the formation of a constituent assembly, and the three-year process culminated in a referendum to adopt the constitution of 2009. These two elements demonstrate significant participation in the

constitutional process, and were designed to continue under constitutional governance with its inscribed tools of direct democracy.⁵⁴

The preamble lays out Morales's agenda:

We, the Bolivian people, of plural composition, from the depths of history, inspired by the struggles of the past, by the anti-colonial indigenous uprising, and in independence, by the popular struggles of liberation, by the indigenous, social and labor marches, by the water and October wars, by the struggles for land and territory, construct a new State in memory of our martyrs.... We have left the colonial, republican and neo-liberal State in the past. We take on the historic challenge of collectively constructing a Unified Social State of Pluri-National Communitarian law, which includes and articulates the goal of advancing toward a democratic, productive, peace-loving and peaceful Bolivia, committed to the full development and free determination of the peoples... with power originating from the people, demonstrate our commitment to the unity and integrity of the country. We found Bolivia anew, fulfilling the mandate of our people, with the strength of our Pachamama and with gratefulness to God.⁵⁵

Especially significant to Morales's positions is the overt inclusion of *Pachamama* alongside the Christian *God*. Coca also finds a place in the document, with a declaration of its "cultural patrimony, as a renewable natural resource of the biodiversity of Bolivia, and as a factor of social unity."⁵⁶ Indigenous rights are specifically outlined throughout the massive document, something that Linda Farthing and Benjamin Kohl argue "may signal deeper indigenous participation in the state but without changing the structures of the state itself."⁵⁷ Almut Schilling-Vacaflor points out the contradictory nature of the new constitution "pushing forward participatory mechanisms" while simultaneously increasing executive power.⁵⁸

There was rarely a mention of Morales in the run-up and aftermath of his 2005 election that didn't include a reference to his unusual dress—traditional indigenous clothing and motifs were omnipresent. The day before his official inauguration, he walked barefoot to the temple at Tiwanaku and was proclaimed "president of the indigenous peoples of the continent."⁵⁹ He and others spoke to the importance of that day to the next 500 years of Latin American history—after 500 under oppression, this was the time for taking power.⁶⁰ His indigenous and *cocalero* roots are a key element of his political persona and inform many of his policies, especially the constitution.

The concept of indigenous identity comes to the heart of Morales's movement on democracy—one that may determine whether he is making progress or simply repeating the patterns of Bolivia's past. Pamela Martin and Frankie Wilmer's 2008 comparative analysis of Bolivia and Ecuador explains that the "fluidity between the *campesino* and indigenous identity is not uncommon in Bolivia where *campesino* activists are also primarily indigenous."⁶¹ His efforts to advance the cause of the indigenous of the Chapare is one area that opens his actions up to criticism. According to Thomas Grisaffi, the complex relationship between indigenous groups in Bolivia is complicated by the colonizer status of main groups of the Chapare, the Amaya and Quechua peoples.⁶² This likely led that indigenous-*campesino* "fluidity:"⁶³ as the challenges to the *campesino* status and coca rights of the "*originarios*" was challenged by those "from here" (the lowland Yungas), the new indigenous identity returned their "inalienable right to cultivate coca leaf because they are *originarios*."⁶⁴ As Margaret Poulous explains, the former president's policies strip ancestral coca zones of their protection from forced eradication and "appease foreign

concerns surrounding legalized coca, while addressing the needs of his primary constituents in the Chapare.”⁶⁵ Those constituents, like Morales himself, are the modern-day colonizers.

Given the colonist overtones of Morales’s past and his overt displays of indigeneity, Brienen’s characterization of him is apt: a leader who “who employs the symbolism of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist rhetoric to engage in dramatic displays of defiance and resistance.”⁶⁶ Morales’s own actions before and after his election belie the dramatic side of his activism. Prior to his election, Morales took a hardline stance against the United States—“Long live coca, death to the yankees” was once his signature cry at the end of his speeches⁶⁷—but from the Burnt Palace Morales talked of compromise. This change in rhetoric supports Jeffrey Webber’s argument that the MAS policies with Morales at the helm are actually a reflection of continuity in Bolivia rather than the radical change they claim.⁶⁸ This is another example of the difference Breinen points out between Morales’s speeches and actions.

When Morales announced that Bolivia’s indigenous “had earned their right to hold political power via the elections ‘as owners of this land,’”⁶⁹ he echoed Eduardo Galleano’s 1973 sentiments that the people of Latin America continue to claim their “natural right” to the land.⁷⁰ This ownership is part of the decolonization rhetoric Morales often uses, set in a desire to return from the 500 years of oppression. As part of this effort, Morales opened a Ministry for Decolonization upon taking office, with a mission described as the conversion of the state “into an expression of our identity and our traditions.”⁷¹ However, interviews conducted by Linda Farthing and Benjamin Kohl in *Evo’s Bolivia* point to a complication of this attitude. As one Guaraní Bolivian said, “we find that what is being offered by the government is an increase in indigenous perspectives from the highlands rather than a focus on our own [Guaraní] heroes and stories.”⁷² Despite the “plurinational” focus of the constitution and modern thought, Morales seems to be leaning closer to a nationalistic model, with a homogenous indigenous identity.⁷³

Morales’s commitment to the *cocaleros* has created what Charles Hale calls the “*indio permitido*” and Fabricant and Postero set up as a struggle between “good Indians” and “bad Indians.”⁷⁴ Morales has always been clear on whom he represents: “If we win, not just Evo will be president, but the Quechua and Aymara will also be in the presidency.”⁷⁵ But while he represents the two largest indigenous groups, others are not only left out of his efforts, they tend to be the “bad Indians” and among his antagonists.

Writing in 2005, Pablo Stefanoni and Hervé Do Alto were optimistic about Bolivia’s “new nationalism” and its “peasant and indigenous masses who were advancing a new idea of ‘Bolivianness’ that was anti-colonial, multi-cultural and inclusive.”⁷⁶ The previous governments had been run by a white-mestizo class, and the regimes promoted a “homogenous mestizo cultural ideal. This ideal appropriated important aspects of Indian culture. . . to give it ‘authenticity’ and roots, but the European stock provided the guarantee that it would be modern and forward looking.”⁷⁷ Schilling-Vacaflor explains that

Until recently democracy represented an exclusive and discriminatory pact of the ruling elite and that many times the rule of law primarily served the interests of the rich. . . Many members of indigenous-*campesino* sectors of society may now be unwilling to fully respect governance models which in the past served to repress their aims of emancipation, and which were perceived as externally imposed (neo)colonial or imperialist power structures.⁷⁸

Under those governments, though there were fewer indigenous in office, there were not international concerns about violations of indigenous rights. Martin and Wilmer explain that this is due to their large presence in the population and ability to “advance their claims both by participation in ‘normal’ politics,” and Brienen agrees, adding that “when unable to participate in the political process by voting, have done so by organizing, protesting, and at times, turning to violence.”⁷⁹ After the constitution, though, historians have addressed concerns not only about the *indio permitido* attitude but also the oppression of the mestizo and non-indigenous population. For Morales, the *opportunity* for participation was not enough, and his focus on indigenous rights can justify “the flouting of certain democratic and legal rules,” creating an opportunity for the former ruling class to become the “principal victim of racial oppression in the country.”⁸⁰

The causation of Morales’s declining popularity and removal from office can be traced to the 2009 constitution. The document in and of itself is democratic in that it continues to ensure universal suffrage and civil liberties, but the expansion of executive power introduces an opportunity to challenge that. One concern with ensuring democracy after the constitution comes from Morales’s strong connection with his indigenous background. After rising from the minority to run the country, Morales made sure the document protected the rights of his class—the new ruling class. Morales is known to put one group of indigenous over others and often claims their interests as Bolivia’s. Under his government, other indigenous groups and non-indigenous people were marginalized.⁸¹ This does not support protection of minority rights and thus, does not advance Bolivian democracy.

Morales’s divisive social politics create a hierarchy of citizens and simply change who the oppressed citizens are. The increasing racial conflict from the top inspires citizens to see Morales’s administration as corrupt and does not lead to a sustainable system.⁸² Charges of corruption and tyranny have led to previous revolutionary actions—policies that divide are not progress toward national sovereignty.

2011 TIPNIS ROAD PROJECT, LAND RIGHTS AND LATIN AMERICAN DEPENDENCE

Bolivia’s land-locked status presents some issues when trying to encourage trade with foreign nations. In 2011, Morales’s government began construction on a highway from Cochabamba to Brazil, funded and built primarily by that nation.⁸³ The 160-mile highway was slated to run through the Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS), but the affected indigenous groups had not been consulted as required by the 2009 constitution. When faced with pushback after the 2010 announcement, Morales made his position clear by calling anyone who opposed him an “enemy of Bolivia” and telling the “so-called defenders of the environment... that whether they like it or not, we’re going to build this highway and we’re going to deliver it under my administration.”⁸⁴

The protests had the desired effect when Morales cancelled construction and declared TIPNIS as untouchable. He claimed the issue was resolved and praised his own actions, saying, “This is governing by obeying the people.”⁸⁵ However, the highway project returned in 2012 with indigenous consultations after counter protests demanding the road appeared in La Paz. After the meetings, the government reported that 80 percent of TIPNIS indigenous groups approved of the road and created a new proposal for an “ecological highway.”⁸⁶ Morales called this a “triumph of

representative democracy," even as opposed indigenous continued to protest.⁸⁷ No road emerged, but in 2017, Morales suddenly reversed the "untouchable" action, again opening the door to this construction.

The Bolivian Revolution of 1952 resulted in, among other victories, a return of the land to the people. In *Liberty for Latin America*, Alvaro Vargas Llosa posits that "the transition that took place was not from exclusive property by few private owners to full property by millions of private owners, but to a symbolic form of property by the peasants, while the state, the entity that embodied the collective rights of the masses, became the real owner."⁸⁸ The main land rights concern that emerges from the TIPNIS protests centers around the same issue. In 2009, Morales gave indigenous communities in the area a "provisional title" with collective property rights to TIPNIS.⁸⁹ This was not quite the same as his earlier claims that indigenous owned the land, and he demonstrated the difference with the highway project.

The hierarchical structure of indigenous in Bolivia certainly should be examined as a factor in the project. Farthing explains the belief differences between highland indigenous's individual ownership and the communal structure of lowland groups being complicated by "economic dependence on escalating resource extraction that places minority rights to territory and livelihoods in conflict with the majority rights to share in resource rents."⁹⁰ Fabricant and Postero add that some indigenous communities have differing relationships with resource extraction and may support projects that improve their access to services. Morales and other TIPNIS advocates play on the hierarchy by suggesting that the highway would bring modernity and those resisting are "remaining as savages."⁹¹ For the groups who live in the TIPNIS area, though, the park "is the lung of which we Bolivians breath[e]."⁹² This conflict goes back to the idea that, like the *cocaleros*, indigenous groups are not one mass body, but a "heterogenous mélange" and in Morales's Bolivia, the interests of some groups are placed higher. Thus, "National sovereignty is tied to the submission of lowland indigenous lands, territories, and bodies."⁹³

The "untouchable" label that Morales placed on TIPNIS in 2011 created further problems. Though it increased protection for potential resource extraction, it also prevented the sustainable development that indigenous communities in the park relied upon.⁹⁴ As public opinion turned against Morales on the issue, Fabricant and Postero point to a greater mistrust of the president: "Some even suggested that the intangible declaration was actually a form of spiteful punishment by the Morales state, a kind of bad-faith invocation of ideals of environmental protection and sovereignty."⁹⁵ Morales's partisan handling of indigenous issues calls his commitment to democracy into question.

The TIPNIS project raises another issue for Morales's platform: that of foreign involvement within Latin America. Morales has never shied from his ties to Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez, but his association with regional governments does not match his pro-sovereignty stance. As part of the "pink tide" in Latin America, Morales had plenty of leftist regional governments to forge associations with—and his diplomatic tour before his inauguration started with anti-US leaders Castro and Chavez. This concerned some inside his own party, who wanted to ensure that the new government was "uniquely Bolivian" rather than seeming to be a copy of Venezuela or Chile, led by a disciple of those leaders.⁹⁶ This attitude was echoed in 2011 when Morales announced that Brazil was intimately involved with the highway, both in construction and financing. An opposition leader referred to Brazil as "an imperialist power" making a claim on Bolivian resources, though Morales argued that the road would allow more access to trade.⁹⁷

The issue of foreign involvement popped up in Bolivia in the weeks before Morales left office, when he drew criticism for his response to wildfires sweeping across Latin America. Though his policies may have been partly to blame, as calls to accept foreign aid in fighting the fires ramped up, Morales claimed that would be “an affront to national sovereignty.”⁹⁸ In addition to facing criticism for this decision, citizens question his overall commitment to his values—slash-and-burn clearing of land does not support environmentalism, and neither does a lack of action in the name of sovereignty.

Just two years after guaranteeing indigenous rights in the constitution, Morales violated them with the TIPNIS construction. Again, the constitution is not the problem: it is Morales’s policies. The drawn-out process of the project provided him multiple attempts to rectify and commit to the protected minority rights—instead he doubled down with the “untouchable” decree, and its hasty removal in 2017. Evo Morales is not making progress toward maintaining democracy.

This project also needs to pass the test for the promotion of Bolivian sovereignty. Morales’s attempt to open access to the Atlantic Ocean and rest of the world through Brazil would support sovereignty, but again his policies do not hold up when pressed. Foreign trade is required but Brazilian financing of the projects speaks to dependence and is an example of the challenges that Morales is not able to navigate. The TIPNIS decree, and subsequent action on the project, have not made progress toward sovereignty or democracy; in fact, they show a decline over time.

This project, like the earlier nationalization of hydrocarbons, was intended to support Bolivia’s indigenous peoples. In comparison to the widely-supported hydrocarbon decree, this one had the primarily positive effect on highland indigenous groups of increased access to trade, with a negative effect on the lowland groups who would be disrupted by the planned route. Again, Morales’s initial broad base of support resulted in his conflation of highland interests, lowland interests, and Bolivian interests.

2017 COCA LAW, COCA PRODUCTION, AND FOREIGN INTERVENTION

Morales’s rhetoric during 2005 was strong when he promised to decriminalize coca farming and blamed citizens of developed nations for “converting it into an addictive substance to be consumed by a decadent U.S. public.”⁹⁹ Once in office, he worked to expand the allowable production from 12,000 acres to 20,000 acres; he finally succeeded in 2017 when the General Coca Law (Law 906) replaced Law 1008 and allowed expanded coca production in two regions: 14,300 acres in La Paz and 7,700 in Cochabamba.¹⁰⁰ Yungas farmers were not prohibited from growing coca under Law 1008—and their larger farms caused conflict even before Morales was president.¹⁰¹

Morales’s arguments on coca purports to take the side of the *cocalero*, but the coca producers represent a “heterogenous mélange of people from different origins and backgrounds” rather than a unified group.¹⁰² One area of conflict between indigenous groups stems from the question of why growth is needed in other areas: “The Yungas contend that they are the real producers of coca for traditional use, arguing that the Chapare crops are destined for use in cocaine production and narcotrafficking.”¹⁰³

While there are 17,000 tons of coca produced in the Chapare, the legal market only receives 1,800 tons, meaning that 89 percent of the coca produced in Chapare is not entering the legal market. In the Yungas of La Paz, on the other hand, 20,600 tons are produced and

20,091 enter the legal market. According to economist Carlos Hoffman, Morales claims that controlled legalization of coca is for traditional coca consumption, but the government will collect an estimated two million dollars in taxes from trafficked coca through the new law. Around 58% of the total coca produced in Bolivia is legal while the rest goes toward the drug trade. Producing only legal coca would be prohibitively expensive; it currently costs 500 dollars per cato, or 10 dollars per kilo, but if fully legalized, the price would drop greatly. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the Morales administration to control the legalization of coca because *cocaleros* will leave the market if there is a dramatic price decrease.¹⁰⁴

Morales has frequently pointed to Bolivian efforts to reduce drug trafficking, but has made clear that farmers must come first—“‘zero narcotrafficking,’ . . . but not ‘zero coca.’”¹⁰⁵ Law 906 purported to allow the indigenous *campesinos* to continue producing coca in the Bolivian tradition. The Bolivian tradition, though, seems to be trafficking.

Under Law 1008, the La Paz Yungas was the primary location for 12,000 acres of legal coca cultivation—the coca that was used in traditional way by Bolivian nationals.¹⁰⁶ In 2004, then-President Carlos Mesa allowed a technically-illegal 3,000 acres of coca, “grown for traditional, personal consumption” in the Chapare with the goal of eradicating the rest, in line with global interests in the reduction of cocaine.¹⁰⁷ Poulos explains that by conflating all coca production, Morales is undermining the rights to “ancestral” coca producing zones—and “appeas[ing] foreign concerns . . . while addressing the needs of his primary constituents in the Chapare.”¹⁰⁸ During Morales’s presidency, coca production in Bolivia initially increased due to this allowance, but had been decreasing steadily since 2010, prior to the enactment of increased production laws.¹⁰⁹ IMF data shows Bolivia’s shadow economy to follow a similar downward curve.¹¹⁰

When Morales took office, the most recent United Nations figures showed Bolivia as the third largest coca-producing country, with 118 tons in 2004.¹¹¹ Morales and his *cocalero sindacatos* had been fighting US-led eradication policies for decades, claiming that coca had been grown in Bolivia for centuries, the international drug trade was not the fault of the *cocaleros*, and that eradication policies did not allow farmers to earn a living. In 1990, Robert Collier reported that after six years of crop substitution, there were fewer than 200 acres of alternate crops.¹¹² In response, Morales said “Crop substitution has been no more than a slogan . . . For the peasant it has been an attempt at swindling him into eradicating his coca in exchange for some cash, and seeds for a series of crops that cannot be sold.”¹¹³ The harm that this outside influence had on his country set the stage for Morales’s drive for Bolivian sovereignty.

Since his *secretario* days, Morales has been able to use rhetoric as a helpful tool. In the 1980s and 1990s, he regularly talked to reporters about the evils of the US Drug Enforcement Agency, saying “They rule the Chapare. What they say goes. They destroy rural roads, they commit abuses against the peasant community, they stage illegal raids on homes . . . and they even rape;”¹¹⁴ as well as threatening violence if their policies remained.¹¹⁵ In the months prior to his 2005 election, he repeatedly brought up US involvement in his previous campaign, when the US Ambassador drove support for Morales after publicly criticizing him.¹¹⁶ Brienan points to the efficacy of this strategy, trying to “unify the masses to appeal to their sense of indignation over injustices—real and imagined—suffered by Bolivians at the hands of outsiders.”¹¹⁷ By painting

the actions of the United States as violent, anti-indigenous, and anti-Bolivia, Morales convinces his constituents that sovereignty, not globalism, is the answer.

Morales's coca stance does support sovereignty—Bolivia is creating a place in the world economy on its own terms. By speaking of his commitment to global norms while failing to implement them or actively working against them in his own policies, Morales is refusing to give in to foreign demands. So long as there is a global coca market, Bolivian *campesinos* can make a profit. The foreign attempts at replacement crops were not intended for local market, so this is not hurting sustainability by preventing food production. Coca enters the global market in the same way that quinoa or cardamom would.

The coca stance, however, does face opposition from some in the country, particularly those who grow coca for traditional purposes and do not want to reputation as drug traffickers. Their narrative speaks to the importance of voice in Bolivia. As with the TIPNIS project, this alternate indigenous narrative is missing from the government's consideration. The significant number of people in the country who do not want coca being produced for the cocaine trade, provide another example of Morales promoting the interest of one constituency as the interests of all Bolivia. The top-down ruling on Bolivian interests, silencing large groups of stakeholders, does not make progress towards democracy.

CONCLUSION

The 2009 Constitution limits presidents to two terms in office, but the Bolivian courts determined that only the term beginning with its reign actually counted toward the total; thus Morales was eligible for reelection in 2014. He won that election with more than 60 percent of the vote, compared to just shy of 25 percent for his closest challenger.¹¹⁸ A strong economy helped Morales despite policies that were more decisive, but his MAS party took a hit, losing ground in Congress.¹¹⁹ This type of action, an almost immediate subversion of the new document of the people, suggests it may be what Sebastian Edwards calls an "aspirational constitution, based upon the present society's goals and ambitions."¹²⁰

In 2016, Morales tried to extend his term again, seeking a removal of term limits from the constitution. Though a referendum failed, the court again sided with Morales, overturning the result saying that "denying his candidacy was an infringement of his human rights."¹²¹ For Morales, this potential infringement was a bigger challenge to democratic ideals than overturning a referendum. More challenges to democracy came in the election of 2019, where Morales narrowly avoided a runoff election, but the Organization of American States refused to certify the election based on the presence of "deliberate actions that sought to manipulate the results of the election" and "grave irregularities."¹²² It was in the midst of this disputed election that Morales left Bolivia in late 2019.

The new president, conservative Jeanine Áñez signaled a departure from Morales in her first days in office. She has now banned "'personality cults'" in Bolivia's institutions" and more, Frida Ghitis explains:

She alienated the indigenous population . . . [when] she raised an outsized Bible and declared that she was "returning the Bible to the palace." Áñez, a light-skinned blond woman, made things worse by naming an all-white cabinet. Following an outcry, she added

an indigenous minister, but by then Morales's loyalists had branded her "la mujer teñida" ("the dyed woman") or, simply, "the whore."¹²³

While his government in recent years has been called authoritarian, Morales equates Añez's actions to a coming dictatorship after years of his democracy.¹²⁴ With the relative stability of his term, it remains to be seen whether the Añez government results in continuity or a return to the neoliberalism of the years prior.

Evo Morales served as president of Bolivia for nearly fourteen years, after more than two decades as an indigenous and *cocalero* activist. When he took the leadership position, he accepted the responsibility to serve both Bolivia and her indigenous people—to bring Bolivia democracy and national sovereignty. Morales's version of democracy, though, is intertwined with sovereignty, and centered on increasing the rights of the indigenous peoples who brought him to notoriety. The difference between his view and a more standard definition is the place where he comes up short.

Through the examination of policies enacted during each of his terms, it is clear that although Bolivian systems have moved toward democracy and national sovereignty under Morales, his own actions undermined national progress. In advocating for his indigenous rights, Morales did more harm than good by the end of his presidency. His actions did not support his stated aims of democracy and sovereignty, and his commitment to his indigenous identity was a major factor. The MAS government with Morales at the helm made some progress, but the lack of underlying democratic structure gave him enough power to undo it. This linear examination of his policies allows a clear demonstration of the causes of his decline. Morales was closest to his goals when leaning toward his activist roots in the early days of his presidency—when he represented those at the bottom of Bolivia. The longer he stayed at the top, the more he ruled from there.

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