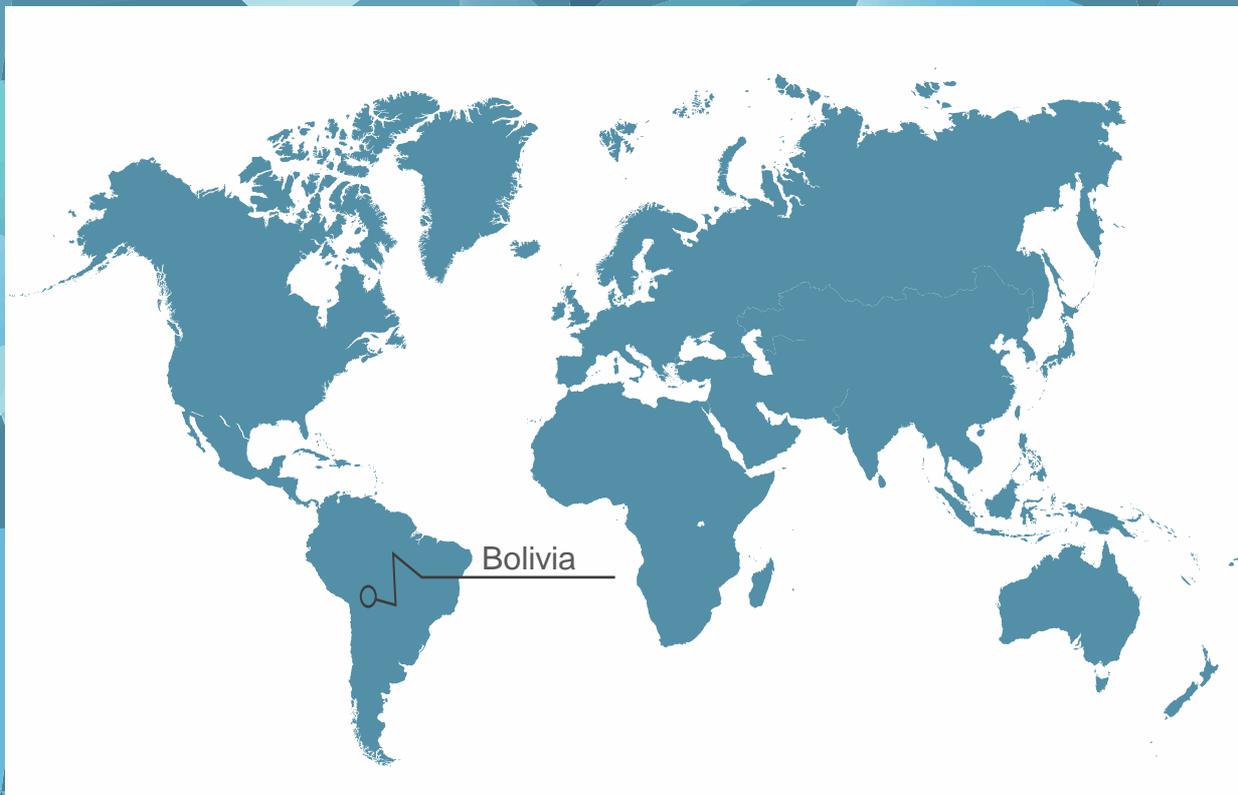


GPPAC Alert



PLURINATIONAL BOLIVIA: Change Process and Social Conflict

By Theo Roncken, Acción Andina



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Plurinational Bolivia:
Change Process and Social Conflict

Authored by Theo Roncken
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List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

CIDOB	Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia / Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia
CONAMAQ	Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu / National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu
CPE	Constitución Política del Estado / Political State Constitution
COB	Central Obrera Boliviana / Bolivia's Central Worker's Union
FEJUVE	Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto / Federation of Neighbour's Association's
IBCE	Instituto Boliviano de Comercio Exterior / The Bolivian Institute of Foreign Trade
MAS	Movimiento Al Socialismo / Movement for Socialism
MSM	Movimiento Sin Miedo / Movement Without Fear
PLAC-Paz	Plataforma Latinoamericana para la Prevención de Conflictos y la Construcción de la Paz / Latin American and Caribbean Platform for the Prevention of Armed and/or Violent Conflict and Peace Building
RIN	Reservas Internacionales Netas / Net International Reserves
TIPNIS	Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Secure / Indigenous Territory and the Isiboro-Sécure National Park
UNITAS	Unión Nacional de Instituciones para el Trabajo de Acción Social National / Union of Institutions of Social Action Work

In February 2016, the Bolivian President Evo Morales suffered electoral defeat for the first time in ten years. In a national referendum, a majority of voters rejected a proposal to bypass constitutional law and allow Morales to run in 2019 for his fourth consecutive presidential term.

That judgment, however definitive in legal terms, did not put an end to the controversy, and in the months following the referendum several attempts emerged to revoke its results. More recently, other signs of a growing political crisis reached the international media when Vice-minister Rodolfo Illanes was taken hostage and killed during negotiations with a belligerent group of cooperative mine workers in August 2016. As reflected in recent events, after a brief interruption in Morales' first years of presidency, Bolivia's political leadership is again subject to a growing risk of reaching high levels of contested governance. This paper explores the historical context, socio-economic and political developments that frame the current situation, from the perspective of state-society interactions in Bolivia. Based on this analysis, it identifies key actors and options for a conflict prevention and resolution agenda, and for safeguarding human Security in Bolivia going forward.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2009, the Bolivian State and society formalized a new governance framework for a Plurinational State, which signaled a political opening towards traditionally excluded social sectors. The adoption of a new Political State Constitution (Constitución Política del Estado, CPE) concluded a lengthy and conflict-ridden constitutional drafting process, and paved the way for a collective reconstruction of relations in the various social and institutional spheres of Bolivia. The approval of the Constitution text by popular referendum was a milestone in a "change process" that started years before the administration of President Evo Morales in the midst of growing social protest against a declining political model. A key tenet in this change process concerns State-society relations, which were captured in the foundational principles of the new Plurinational State. Pursuant to section 8 of the new constitution, these relations should be underpinned by values of unity, equality, inclusion, dignity, liberty, solidarity, reciprocity, respect, interdependence, harmony, transparency, balance, equal opportunities, social and gender equality in participation, common welfare, responsibility, social justice, distribution and redistribution of social wealth and resources.

Conflict trends in Bolivia cannot be interpreted without taking the various aspects of this change process into

account. There are contrasting views on how the process has been managed politically, which have been voiced but not usually debated in the public sphere. This reflects the need for a timely and continuous exchange on both conflicting and complementary perspectives among the key actors and observers in Bolivia. During the course of President Evo Morales' second administration (2010-2014), there was certainly a growing impetus for conflict management observation and monitoring initiatives, with a dramatic increase of publications on the subject matter and "conflictologists" participating in public and private spheres. However, there are few local forums or platforms for reflection that can enable joint action at different levels. This paper seeks to identify the internal conflict dynamics and the key actors in Bolivia that may play a role in preventing crisis and conflict escalation in the country as the change process continues to unfold.

Why an alert about social conflict in Bolivia?

In spite of wide-spread social tensions and an ongoing trend towards radicalized social protest, Bolivia is usually considered politically stable, and most observers rule out a potential escalation into a governance crisis in the near future. One of the main containment factors is the progressive build-up of a financial buffer under Evo Morales' administrations, thanks to increased revenues from the export of commodities (in particular fuels and minerals) which until recently even resisted the direct impact of the global economic crisis. Nevertheless, there is a need to understand how the different social dynamics, motivations and political practices interact to influence and address conflicts and their causes, as these could potentially trigger a crisis in the mid-term. This calls for a permanent and adequate consideration of alert messages. A number of critical issues can be easily identified, including

- in the economic sphere: reliance on extractive industries for export, insufficient agricultural production to cover the domestic market needs, privatization trends which are often negated in the dominating political discourse;
- in the social and cultural sphere: growing job insecurity, inadequate public utility services, a declining social welfare system, everyday violence, top-down expressions of power in the social and family sphere, as well as segregation and deterioration of the social fabric;
- in the political sphere: prevalence and renewal of authoritarian, patronage-based and exclusionary practices, inability to reach agreements over objectives and strategic State programs and recurring management deficiencies.

This paper considers the Bolivian situation since 2006 from a post-conflict scenario perspective, as explained in the section to follow. The significant political-ideological, economic and socio-cultural fragmentation reflected across various sectors provide ample reason to be on the alert. The intention of exploring the whole set of factors and actors that impact on the conflict dynamics is not limited to a risk assessment exercise on political stability or peaceful coexistence. Rather, the notion that must prevail is that "it is critical to interpret conflicts from a democratic perspective, since it allows us to evaluate the maturity of the political system and its interaction

with society.”¹ State-society interaction in Bolivia is highly dynamic and intimately linked with the evolution of social conflict. Using a conflict transformation approach, this paper aims to highlight the opportunities that can be drawn from “the concurrence of informed, organized and autonomous citizens, with the capacity to act as agents of change.”²

State-society interaction in Bolivia is highly dynamic and intimately linked with the evolution of social conflict

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Background and scope of this paper

This paper analyzes the features of social conflict during the 'Evo years' (2006-2016) – including the motivations, actors, and opportunities for transformation that they represent. Which types of conflict stand out? What are the less obvious dynamics that are also relevant? What motivates key actors to operate in the different scenarios? How did relations change with time and what are the expectations in terms of their growing role over the next several years?

Fortunately, there are already important social conflict observation and monitoring practices in place in the country - including data systematization and analysis, situation and topic analyses and case studies. As a result, this document is based on a valuable set of books, reports, articles, press releases and other national and international publications. While it has not been possible to include all such wealth of information, data selection was based on twenty years of work in direct collaboration with different social groups and organizations associated with Bolivian conflict. Three feedback and validation stages were included for this paper, with the participation of observers and scholars focused on the Bolivian state of affairs,³ and with the members of the GPPAC-affiliated Latin American and Caribbean Platform for the Prevention of Armed and/or Violent Conflict and Peace Building (PLAC-Paz).

Analyzing social conflict and unrest

At the end of December 2013, the analysis unit of *The Economist* ranked Bolivia among the countries in the world with the highest risk of social unrest.⁴ Yet, the Bolivian media that echoed the news article ruled out any possibility of political instability, such as the one faced by the country during the prelude to Evo Morales' presidency, described in the background section below.

The characteristics of social unrest at any given moment will vary depending on the type of conflict at hand, the political culture, the stakeholders' capacity to mobilize, the responses of the State, and various other factors.⁵ At the societal level in Bolivia, a recent survey showed that eight out of ten individuals preferred dialogue as a means to solve social conflicts, yet half of them would take to the streets to make their voices heard. The growing social mobilization and protest practices in recent decades are explained as a response to the loss of legitimacy of dialogue.⁶ Consequently, collective actions are “the preferred means of State-society interlocution.”⁷

Most observers agree in interpreting these social conflict dynamics in Bolivia as an essential element for democratic development.⁸ Without conflict, there is no change or improvement. Conflict is an “inevitable element (... which) always implies a relationship of power, an interaction and a transaction”,⁹ and social conflict can generate positive change as much as it can build up into a destructive political force. Whether it goes into one direction or the other will depend on the “different strategies implemented to process change.”¹⁰ Consideration must therefore be given to the different stakeholders and to the “range of actions adopted by social movements which expresses their identities, interests, outreach and positions, and which reflect the social relations involved and the power interests at stake.”¹¹ Hence, instead of studying social conflict on a case by case basis, the proposal is to study the conflict scenario, understood “not (...) as the mere sum of specific conflicts of a similar type, but rather as the full range and interrelations of conflicts and their impact on social and power relations.”¹²

1 Zegada, M.T. (2014) “Conflictos sociales, contenidos y sujetos en el proceso de cambio,” at: <http://www.ceresbolivia.org/archivos/1251>. NOTE: all quotes taken from original material in Spanish have been freely translated by the author and GPPAC for the purpose of this paper.

2 *Ibid.*-

3 We are particularly thankful for the support of the research project on violence and citizen insecurity in urban areas by the Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS) from Cochabamba.

4 “Bolivia, con ‘Muy alto riesgo’ de rebelión para el 2014, según *The Economist*,” in *El Día*, December 23, 2013.

5 See Komadina, J. (2012) “Conflictos y desafíos políticos e institucionales del segundo gobierno de Evo Morales,” Cochabamba: UNDP/FBDM, p.2.

6 “Los intereses de grupo activan conflictos sociales desde 2006,” in *La Razón*, December 15, 2013.

7 Rojas, C. (2015) “Conflictividad en Bolivia (2000-2014). ¿Cómo revertir la

normalización de la presión social?”, La Paz: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, p.21.

8 UNDP (2010) “Bolivia National Human Development Report. *The Changes behind the Change. Inequalities and Social Mobility in Bolivia*,” La Paz;

Zegada, M.T., Arce, C., Canedo, G. and Quispe, A. (2011) “*La democracia desde los márgenes: transformaciones en el campo político boliviano*,” La Paz: Muela del Diablo/CLACSO; Fundación UNIR (2012) “*Perfiles de la conflictividad social en Bolivia (2009-2011). Análisis multifactorial y perspectivas*,” La Paz; and Rojas, C. (2015), *op.cit*

9 Coser (1961) in Komadina, *op.cit.*, p.2.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Calderón, F. (1986) (coord.) “*Los movimientos sociales ante la crisis*,” Buenos Aires: CLACSO/UNU, p.355.

12 Sarti, C. and Aguilar, C. (2006) “*La conflictividad guatemalteca y su abordaje constructivo*,” Guatemala: Fundación Propaz/IBIS/Netherlands Embassy, p.11.

EVOLUTION OF THE BOLIVIAN CONFLICT CONTEXT

Background of the change process (2000-2005)

There is no doubt that the election of Evo Morales, the presidential candidate for the *Movimiento Al Socialismo* (MAS - Movement for Socialism), in December 2005 marked a turning point in the Bolivian socio-political landscape. There was a shift in power elites as the State was challenged on a number of structural failures: for reproducing the historical dynamics of social exclusion, for its centralistic management, for the inability of the neoliberal economic model to respond to the needs and expectations of the population, and for the lack of credibility of the political representation system and the parties that ran it.¹³ All of this caused growing popular discontent which was eventually channeled through widespread protest.

There was a shift in power elites as the State was challenged on a number of structural failures

Observers point at the “War over Water” as the overt beginning of the struggle for deep change. In 2000, the War over Water led to the development of an unprecedented alliance among multiple rural and urban social sectors, united in their protest against the privatization of water utility services in Cochabamba. This marked the start of a period of strong social mobilization, which would culminate five years later in the electoral victory of Evo Morales. The continuous grassroots efforts and their increasing demands for the nationalization of strategic natural resources, for the revocation of neoliberal economic policies, and the implementation of major institutional changes through a constitution-making process catalyzed the loss of legitimacy of political authorities and the governance pacts.

This process first led to the downfall of the Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada administration in October 2003, and then to the resignation of his successor, President Carlos D. Mesa in June 2005. After a failed attempt by 'traditional' political parties to retain power over the Executive by appointing the Chairman of the Senate as president, the then-Chairman of the Supreme Court of Justice Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé finally took the helm, with the express mandate to call new national elections. This closed a period of historical social conflict which, due to its special impact on

governance conditions, marked the beginning of a post-conflict period in 2006.

2006-2008: End of the inter-hegemonic struggle

During the first administration of President Evo Morales (2006-2009) the number of reported incidents of social unrest remained relatively low.¹⁴ This period was referred to as the closing of the inter-hegemonic struggle era, in which the confrontation between two rival power blocs had the effect of organizing and curbing conflict.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the climate of intense ideological polarization did trigger (a relatively low) number of violent confrontations among different social sectors during the constitution-making period, creating a sense of increased conflict levels. The main question at stake, the State reform, revealed “different types of cleavages: regional-territorial, ethnic-cultural, political-ideological, class and even racial conflicts.”¹⁶ Finally, the disproportionate use of violence by some opposition groups, together with their inability to deal with the conflicts proactively (unlike MAS, which took advantage of them), created cracks in the opposition and an insurmountable loss of credibility for its national political project.¹⁷

Apart from these tensions between political adversaries in this period, there were confrontations among social sectors that were politically allied yet economically opposed, and whose demand for attention kept growing over the following years. Such conflicts have not found a structural solution to this day as this would run contrary to the government’s economic policies, and thus tend to flare up on a regular basis. A case in point was the violent clash in October 2006 between cooperative miners and salaried, unionized workers of the government-owned mines in a dispute over the exploitation of tin veins in Huanuni’s Posoki Mountain (Oruro district). The then-favorable value of export minerals made it possible to solve the conflict by hiring all the cooperative workers involved as salaried government employees. However, in April 2015, within the context of reduced international mineral prices, union leaders alerted about the mining company Empresa Minera de Huanuni’s plan to cut their workforce and criticized the lack of adequate structural mining policy.¹⁸ Published statistics (as presented in the sections below) sustain that critique and reveal a major incoherence between official discourse and political practice. While the government alleges to have nationalized the strategic mining sector, the figures show a growing major control of private enterprise over mining activity in Bolivia, as elaborated further below.

¹³ Zegada, M.T., Arce, C., Canedo, G. and Quispe, A. (2011) “La democracia desde los márgenes: transformaciones en el campo político boliviano”, La Paz: Muela del Diablo/CLACSO, p. 29.

¹⁴ With an average of 24 conflicts per month (Fundación UNIR, *op.cit.*, p. 50-51), compared to a monthly average of 42 conflicts in the 2000-2005 period (Rojas, C., *op.cit.*, p. 27).

¹⁵ Argirakis, H. (2013) “La reconfiguración del campo político boliviano,” in Andamios.

¹⁶ Zegada et al. (2011), *op.cit.*, p.306.

¹⁷ Zegada et al. highlight as a determining factor in the decline of the opposition bloc “the discourse and symbolic dispossession they suffered when MAS snatched the banner of autonomy from them and incorporated it in the wording of the new constitution, changing its scope and orientation” (*Ibid*, p.307).

¹⁸ “Trabajadores aseguran que el Gobierno fracasó en Huanuni y Enatex,” in Erbol, April 30, 2015.

The violence that took place in the area of Panduro in August 2016, involving cooperative miners, police forces and national authorities are a recent manifestation of that contradiction.

2009-2010: First breakdowns in the hegemonic construction

The overwhelming victory of the ruling party in the national elections held in December 2009, with President Morales securing 63.9% of votes, led to new forms of formal politics. With highly favorable representation in both houses of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly (APL), the President's MAS Party was in a position to impose Government policies and regulations without having to seek the consensus of other parliamentary forces. And that is exactly what they did, while at the same time drawing support, as a "political instrument of the peoples",¹⁹ from allied social movements through public consultations. This marked the beginning of a period characterized by breakdowns in the hegemonic construction²⁰ which eventually involved allies in both spheres - acting in Parliament and/or on the streets - of this political modus vivendi. The most politically supported party in the city of La Paz – the *Movimiento sin Miedo* (MSM - the Movement without Fear)- started to criticize and later denounce and break away from the MAS way of doing politics, which they described as imposing and exclusionary. Also, "interparty strains with whoever challenged or failed to obey the ruling party decisions"²¹ became more apparent.

In this context, the municipal and district elections of April 2010 presented the first opportunity to start reshaping and realigning alternative political forces. Although the MAS won six out of nine district governor positions and 228 out of 336 mayor offices, it lost the mayorships in seven out of ten of the country's main cities and in many municipalities that used to be "bastions of their power."²² These results led to new tensions rooted "in MAS' pursuit of winning back the constituencies they had apparently lost."²³

2011-2012: Two conflicts that marked the political context

Morales' second administration saw an important reactivation of social mobilization and protest actions based on economic demands and identity claims. It is estimated that in 2010 the monthly average of incidents of social unrest tripled.²⁴ There was "unrest over redistribution issues, spurred by a constitution that generously grants and allows for the claiming of rights, within the context of a hybrid system (economic growth, government legitimacy and institutional deficits)",²⁵ with conflicts that "generate instability but not a governance crisis, since their objective is

to force a result (...) rather than to challenge the authorities."²⁶ However, in the last days of 2010, an attempt by the Bolivian government to order the elimination of a government subsidy on fuels for domestic consumption – a measure known as the "gasolinazo" - immediately caused a generalized increase in prices, which triggered a vigorous wave of protests in response. Shocked by the power of the protest actions and their capacity to mobilize large and diverse segments of the population, and acknowledging that his administration was being seriously questioned for the first time, president Morales decided to take a step back. Three days later, he annulled the executive order. Although he was able to defuse the protest, the *gasolinazo* made the population aware of their dependence and collective vulnerabilities, and possibly caused deeper mistrust in the administration.

The gasolinazo made the population aware of their dependence and collective vulnerabilities

The December 2010 events also revived old tensions among allies and ended up consolidating the internal divisions in MAS,²⁷ alienating grassroots organizations of indigenous peoples of the east (*Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia*, the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia - CIDOB) and of the west (*Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu*, the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu - CONAMAQ).²⁸ In 2011 and 2012, both CIDOB and CONAMAQ staged highly influential protests in defense of Mother Earth and the collective rights of the indigenous peoples, which they claimed had been undermined by the Government's economic policy. The indigenous-led protests against the construction of a road through the Indigenous Territory and the Isiboro-Sécure National Park (TIPNIS) were at the heart of this conflict. Beyond this specific scenario, the defense of the TIPNIS area also articulated a challenging set of criticisms around two core issues: the social and environmental impacts of the extractive activities favored by government policies; and the government's violation of the collective right to prior, free and informed consultation, which is constitutionally protected as a *sine qua non* condition for extraction activities in indigenous territories. In spite of the national and international attention drawn by the two indigenous protests and the enormous sympathy expressed by the Bolivian population, their quick gains petered out over time without feeding into a more serious demand for structural change that challenged the political legitimacy of the Bolivian government.

19Originally referred to by MAS as IPSP: Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples.

20 Zegada et al., *op.cit.*, p.88.

21 *Ibid.*, p.308.

22 Fundación UNIR, *op.cit.*, p.56.

23 Zegada et al., *op.cit.*, p.92.

24 Fundación UNIR, *op.cit.*, p.50.

25 Rojas, C., *op.cit.*, p.60.

26 *Ibid.*, p.65.

27 Argirakis, *art.cit.*

28 Komadina, J. y Regalsky P. (2014, unpublished) note in "El movimiento afroboliviano" that this ideological cleavage already existed in the pre constitution-making period (2004-2006), due to differences among sectors (coca producers and colonists) who defended MAS as their main instrument of political representation and sectors that demanded direct representation for each original indigenous people.

2013-2015: A hegemony with limitations

From Morales' second administration until today, the *gasolinazo* and TIPNIS protests were the ones that came closest to questioning the broader and structural implications of the government's policies. However, in terms of their power, none of them presented a challenge to the political hegemony of MAS. Once the immediate impact of the protests dissipated, the conflict context was again dominated by isolated sector disputes and claims, motivated by scattered identity claims and redistribution issues. In retrospect, we should highlight the Bolivian Government's capacity to "strategically reposition itself and redefine the social and political scenario, turning it in its favor",²⁹ and to learn from previous conflicts to "redirect the compass of power".³⁰ The results of the October 2014 national elections, which once again reflected over 60% of support for Morales' candidacy, substantiate this interpretation. However, the *gasolinazo* and TIPNIS landmark conflicts accelerated the shifting of political forces.

In light of this process, it has been said that the ruling power of the MAS has been limited by a deficient leadership, which has been based on force and has had a profound effect on the evolution of social conflict and power shifts in Bolivia. The resulting relationship among political powers is characterized as: "a sort of 'limited hegemony' (...that is) reflected in an antagonistic and ferocious discourse that consistently and symbolically expels opponents from the political arena, stigmatizing them as right-wing forces. In contrast, the forces opposed to the MAS not only have no discourse or alternative vision, but they also lack leadership and a strategy that will allow them to bring their allies together and dispute the political center."³¹

The objections to the Government have materialized again through a large number of specific and isolated popular protests

From this perspective, it is not by chance that the Government's response to conflict consists mainly of "informal mechanisms such as secret alliances with power groups, quotas in public administration positions for social organizations and the so-called 'selective incentives' to obtain political loyalty in exchange for the distribution of resources."³² All these instruments are aimed at deterring or containing conflict in the short, and possibly middle term. However, in the long term they undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the Government administration, the ruling party and probably of the political representation model itself.

Moreover, while the Constitution acknowledges citizen participation and social control mechanisms, their initial implementation reveals biases and limitations that hamper their potential development into the necessary 'checks and balances' that can enrich and deepen the democratic process.³³

In this context, the objections to the Government have materialized again through a large number of specific and isolated popular protests, almost all of which are driven by local claims or disputes. The municipal and sub-regional elections of March 2015, which in general terms had similar results to those of 2010, also failed to suggest alternative political proposals or any major changes to the power structure in the short term³⁴. By way of illustration, it is relevant to note the contrasting interpretations of the election results. On the one hand, the President reported: "We have won, I put it bluntly, we have won", alongside the Vice-President's comment that; "the Movement for Socialism has consolidated itself as the only political force at the national level". On the other hand, the Mayor-elect of Cochabamba stated: "Today there is a renewed opposition with new leaders, which brings in fresh air", and the priest and anthropologist Xavier Albó claimed; "To win with less than two thirds of the vote can be a blessing, in that the MAS will improve their democratic practices with more pluralism and less authoritarianism."³⁵

CAUSES AND DRIVERS OF BOLIVIAN CONFLICT

The peoples-centered agenda embraced by the MAS in its quest for political power was focused on two structural features of the declining State model, which were the causes of rising conflict: an inequitable and dependent economic policy, and an exclusionary and authoritarian institutionalism. These characteristics were present throughout the colonial and republic history of the country, adjusting to the interests of the successive elite groups that shared or dominated the decision-making power. To what extent have these characteristics shifted with the change process and Morales' presidency, and what are the perspectives for the coming years?

Economic Factors: golden eggs and dreams of sovereignty

The macroeconomic figures of the 2006-2014 period are particularly striking. The balance of payments of the country was already recording positive results since 2004, with the first significant increase in oil and gas export prices. Today, these non-renewable natural and mineral resources stand out as the 'golden eggs' of the Bolivian economy and are the

29 Rojas, C., *op.cit.*, p.65.

30 Argirakis, *art.cit.*

31 Komadina, *op.cit.*, p.9

32 *Ibid*, pp.9-10.

33 As per Rosanvallon, P. (2007) at "La contrademocracia: la política en la era de la desconfianza," Buenos Aires: Manantial.

34 Although the recent rejection by referendum of several proposals for District 'Autonomy Statutes' in September 2015 reveals a high level of passive resistance in the population.

35 Peralta, P. "¿Quién ganó, quién perdió en las elecciones subnacionales?," in Página Siete, April 26, 2015.

main direct cause of growth of the per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) - from USD 1,051 in 2005 to USD 2,919 in 2013,³⁶ when the Net International Reserves (RIN) amounted to USD 14,430 million.³⁷ The Bolivian Government claims these positive figures as a successful result of its mixed economy model, with a direct impact on wages, inequality and poverty indexes,³⁸ as well as the growing strategic investments aimed at improving domestic production, food sovereignty, utility services and transportation and communication infrastructures, among others.

Although critical observers acknowledge the economic progress and the important potential of the export of commodities, they warn about the country's gradual departure from a sovereign economy. Questions are raised over the excessive prioritization of the 'hard' sectors, whose income depends on international demand and prices, and which create foreign exchange earnings but few jobs. This could be to the detriment of a serious economic diversification project that, in the long term, would allow for a more autonomous standing and more equitable conditions.

Although critical observers acknowledge the economic progress and the important potential of the export of commodities, they warn about the country's gradual departure from a sovereign economy

In this sense, some critics debunk the government's nationalization discourse on hydrocarbon and minerals. As regards the energy sector, it has been estimated that transnational companies controlled 82.2% of domestic production in 2010, more than in 2005 (75.5%).³⁹ In the case of minerals, in 2012 the private sector concentrated 72.5% of the national territory under concession agreements and 67.1% of the production value.⁴⁰ In addition to this, over the past few years there was a dramatic increase in the participation of cooperatives in the mining industry which, as a rule, harbor extremely deficient labor conditions and show

little interest in reducing environmental impacts. In spite of the shared popular origin of the cooperatives and their vast heterogeneity in terms of labor resources and production volumes, they also entail a specific form of private enterprise, which put pressure on an already weak public sector exploitation.⁴¹

Another issue of concern is the evolution of the agricultural sector. As early as in 2000, Bolivia experienced a food deficit trend "with 20% of the domestic demand covered by imports due to the instability of the cultivated area in the plains, the urbanization-driven changes in household food habits and the decline in peasant agriculture, which used to supply the domestic market,"⁴² Since then, the reliance on food imports has increased,⁴³ a trend which could not be reversed by the significant public investment in the agricultural industry recorded during Morales' first administration. Indeed, during the 2011-2013 period, a promising increase was observed in the cultivation of some agricultural products for domestic consumption, such as green vegetables, wheat, beans and potatoes.⁴⁴ However, in general terms policies are aimed at increasing the production of food through the expansion of the agricultural frontier. As in the rest of the region, this "goes hand in hand with the transnationalization of companies and (...) of foreign capital which has taken the lead,"⁴⁵ a development which does not favor production for the domestic market.

A situation analysis of the soybean agribusiness shows that it "is mainly established in Brazil and Argentina (...) and it sees Bolivia as a natural area for expansion", and that the current presence in Bolivia of around 14,000 small family producers of soybean is regarded as an abnormal situation that will eventually disappear".⁴⁶ Thus, as with oil and gas production, the growing governmental support to corporate agribusiness based in the lower lands of the east seems to mainly impact on agricultural production and foreign exchange earning global data, while it fails to create jobs or address the critical decline of peasant production of food for domestic consumption in the valley areas and the highlands.⁴⁷ Food price increases and regular food shortages resulting from a greater reliance on imported food (as the price of imported goods tends to increase over time) are the main cause of major inflationary pressure.⁴⁸ Although government measures such as social bonds, wage increases and subsidies on imported commodities help to protect the

36 Central Bank of Bolivia - BCB (2014) "Principales logros económicos y sociales 2006-2013," La Paz, p.20.

37 Fundación Milenio (2014) "Informe de Milenio sobre la economía. Gestión 2013," La Paz, p.92.

38 According to the Central Bank of Bolivia, extreme poverty decreased from 38.2% in 2005 to 21.6% in 2012 throughout the country, and from 62.9% to 40.9% in rural areas, while the gap between the poorest 10% and the richest 10% of the population decreased from 128 in 2005 to 46 in 2012 (BCB, *op.cit.*, pp.36-37).

39 With a controlling interest in the Brazilian company Petrobras in general terms (63.7%) and in the Spanish company Repsol (over 50%) in the case of gasoline; Arze, C. (2013) "Nacionalización de los hidrocarburos del gobierno del MAS: balance y perspectivas," in Hora 25, no. 104 (October), pp.9-11.

40 Sandi, E. (2014) "Minería, desarrollo y conflictividad social," in Quiroga,

M.S. y Avejera, J. (2014) La veta del conflicto. Ocho miradas sobre conflictividad minera en Bolivia (2010-2014), La Paz: Fundación UNIR, p.38.

41 In 2012, government-owned mining controlled 16.5% of the area under concession and only 5.5% of domestic production (*ibid.*).

42 Fundación UNIR, *op.cit.*, p.79.

43 In 2013, the Bolivian Foreign Trade Institute reported self-sufficiency in no more than 28 out of 112 products of the Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverage line (at Erbol 17-10-2013).

44 Fundación Milenio, *op.cit.*, p.174.

45 Urioste, M. (2013) "La expansión del agronegocio en Bolivia," at Nueva Crónica, no. 133, October 29, 2013.

46 *Ibid.*

47 Cfr. Fundación UNIR, *op.cit.*, p.79.

48 In 2013, at 6.48%, Bolivia recorded a relatively high inflation rate compared to that of the region

purchasing power of the Bolivian household, the main factor to that effect seems to be migrants' remittances.⁴⁹ Also, illegal businesses, such as the cocaine circuit, the import of 'undocumented' cars (unregistered vehicles with unpaid taxes) and gold smuggling contribute to increasing the liquid assets of the country, but they have an ambiguous impact on household economy. This is because illegal businesses provide a buffer for times of economic crisis, but they do so on a discretionary basis and their redistributive impact is limited. For example, the population can access 'undocumented' cars at a reasonable price, but the widespread money laundering practices also have an effect on increased housing costs. This ambiguity is also reflected in the relationship between these illegal businesses and the social conflict scenario. For example, cooperative gold extraction illegally exported as tax-free 'amalgam' or 'scrap' can be interpreted as a "spontaneous response to the unemployment problem"⁵⁰ while at the same time it reduces the amount of tax revenues collected by the government and creates many disputes over mining areas.

Finally, it should be noted that the sustained decline in global commodity prices (in particular of gas and oil) has started to show a major impact on the Bolivian economy. The Bolivian Institute of Foreign Trade (*Instituto Boliviano de Comercio Exterior*, IBCE) calculates that total export revenues dropped from USD 12,893 million in 2014 to USD 8,726 million in 2015, resulting in the first negative balance of payments in a decade.⁵¹

Socio-cultural factors: historical inequities and day-to-day violence

The education, health and transportation sectors have been subject to publicly funded flagship projects, yet they also bear testimony to vibrant social conflict,⁵² which tends to revolve around local and specific management problems. Firstly, the education sector is characterized by a historical and belligerent leadership of urban teachers, and their claims relate mostly to an accelerated and poorly endorsed process of 'educational revolution' which led to demonstrations nationwide in the first semester of 2014. In turn, protests within the health sector are fragmented and have been unable to adequately address the consequences of years of chronic underinvestment, an issue which led to an unprecedented debate on the need to prioritize the sector in the public budget in the first half of 2015.⁵³ While

health services in Bolivia are marked by structural inequities and a range of shortcomings (in terms of supply, affordability, management, administration and service quality, work conditions, infrastructure, etc.), the complaints are most often directed at local management problems such as the permanent overwork and delays in the payment of salaries. Finally, the corporate transportation union constitutes a strong political basis for the MAS and has shown signs of significant policy influence by combining a direct presence in parliament and other formal spaces of power with pressure actions based on its capacity to control routes and ground access throughout the country. Conflicts often arise from the clash of interests between this sector and the general population, thus legitimizing the local or national authorities' role for negotiation and resolution.

The education, health and transportation sectors have been subject to publicly funded flagship projects, yet they also bear testimony to vibrant social conflict

Furthermore, the overall employment situation contributes one more driver of conflict, liable to build up over time. Unemployment rates are at their historical low in Plurinational Bolivia, yet several population groups live in a very different reality. It has been noted that the poor saving capacity of Bolivian workers coupled with the lack of social protection mechanisms has led to a growing underemployment replacing official unemployment as defined in conventional technical standards.⁵⁴ Women and the youth are the most vulnerable and inclined to take "the more unstable, less productive and unprotected jobs" in the so-called informal economy.⁵⁵ Since 2005, the more educated workers should be included in this group, given that personal investments in education have stopped being rewarded in the labor market, "both for salaried employees and independent workers."⁵⁶ A comparative study conducted in nine countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region has shown that the average net increase in the number of jobs was 7.9% in 2009-2013, consisting mainly of formal employment, which grew by 12.7%.⁵⁷ In Bolivia, however, job formality did not grow or

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.78.

⁵⁰ Carlos Arze in Carvajal, R. "Oro: Ni EBO ni la Aduana pueden con el contrabando," *Erbol*, December 19, 2013.

⁵¹ Cited in: López, E. "Tras una década de repunte, las exportaciones se desploman", *Los Tiempos* 03-08-2016.

⁵² The population of Bolivia has historically shown a greater inclination to demonstration in the pursuit of improved health and education services rather than to claim better salaries or labor conditions ("*Informe 2013*," Santiago de Chile: Corporación Latinobarómetro, pp.42-43). However, the workers in the transportation, health and education areas have taken to the streets together in recent years in more than one fourth of all social conflicts. (Arze, A., 2014, "*La lógica del conflicto minero*," Quiroga and Avejera, *op.cit.*, p.54).

⁵³ The direct cause of this protest was a public campaign led by priest

Mateo Bautista, who proposed to allocate 10% of the public budget to the health sector, and gave rise to heated disputes with government spokespersons. In September 2015, the Catholic Church announced a sudden relocation of father Bautista, who had been posted in Bolivia for 13 years.

⁵⁴ Arze, C. (2014), "*Agudización de la conflictividad laboral en la minería*," Quiroga and Avejera, *op.cit.*, p.133.

⁵⁵ Farah, I., Sánchez, C. y Wanderley, F. (2009) "*Políticas para la inserción laboral de mujeres y jóvenes en el Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia*," Santiago de Chile: CEPAL-ONU/ASDI, p.13.

⁵⁶ Wanderley, F. "*Más calificación, menor remuneración: la nueva realidad laboral en Bolivia*," November 06, 2014.

⁵⁷ ECLAC/ILO (2014) "*Formalización del empleo y distribución de los ingresos laborales*," *Coyuntura laboral en América Latina y el Caribe*, No. 11, Santiago de Chile, p.16.

decrease (and instead remained at 30%), while the labor income gap between men and women grew due to “an increase in the number of formal jobs for men, accompanied by a decrease in the number of formal jobs for women.”⁵⁸ As for youth employment, an independent evaluation of the policies enforced in Bolivia in 2007-2014 concludes that “although youngsters attracted significant attention of employment policies in Bolivia, the programs and projects implemented were costly, with low coverage and a reduced impact to even start addressing the issue.”⁵⁹ In this adverse context, the Bolivian government would be well advised to adopt a Do No Harm approach in its public policies, by paying attention to their effects on the social fabric: “if a conflict tears the social fabric, (...) it may leave nothing in its stead but a deep social deficit and the loss of those social ties that are so essential for social progress.”⁶⁰ Stemming from the interrelation between inequality, violence and social capital,⁶¹ the social fabric also plays a key role in the prevention, handling and reparation of conflict.

The Bolivian government would be well advised to adopt a Do No Harm approach in its public policies.

Accordingly, two interconnected social factors are worth mentioning in terms of their impact on Bolivian conflict, namely the daily tokens of violence, and a growing concern over citizen insecurity. First, they create tension in the coexistence within family and society. Second, under Morales’ administration, they have gained more weight on the political agenda and have started influencing the relation between State and society.

The growing importance of citizen security on Bolivia’s public agenda is based both on objective grounds (large number of complaints and victimization in connection with certain crimes) as well as subjective perceptions (a growing sense of insecurity). It reflects both social motives - with the issue appearing among the top concerns for the population - and political motivations to strengthen state power and institutional control practices. Especially since 2011, the government under the leadership of the MAS has promoted a very strong State presence, which in turn fuels public concern over the issue and positions state institutions themselves as the basis for the solution. In this way, an approach based on the harshening of criminal law and an announced ‘upfront fight against crime and criminality’⁶² is

materially reinforced in a police apparatus that, lacking effective state and/or citizen oversight, has maintained its historically high levels of nepotism, corruption and autonomy. This new repressive impulse has also deepened the structural crisis of criminal justice in Bolivia, which is most clearly seen in the prison system: with 84%, Bolivia is the country in the region with the highest preventive detention rate,⁶³ while prison overpopulation in the cities hit 300%.⁶⁴ In 2016, preventive detention rates dropped to 69% due to ad-hoc legislation that pardon certain categories of prisoners, but in general no major impact was registered on prison overpopulation.

Citizens’ constant concern over insecurity has also surfaced in the form of “lynching,” popularly portrayed as a collective form of “taking justice in one’s own hands.” As far as this form of violence is concerned, Bolivians take a rather permissive attitude;⁶⁵ an urban survey conducted in 2011 showed a position similar to that on day-to-day violence: while 84% of respondents voiced their disagreement with these practices in general, 47% attempted some kind of justification for their use, for instance “to gain respect”;⁶⁶ which reflects the persistence of perceptions and attitudes that normalize recurring violent practices in Bolivia’s society. Such violence especially victimizes the most vulnerable, and plays out in the household, hidden from view. The increasing public attention to gender violence and femicides, and the types of conflict fueled by these, have not (yet) translated into any meaningful attempts to challenge ideas, habits and relations of underlying power structures. Over the last few years, the voices of organized civil society have joined in promoting citizen security and protection policies that are more characteristic of a penal State. They advocate for strengthened state institutions as a means to address complex social problems within the limited scope of the criminal justice.

The voices of organized civil society have joined in promoting citizen security and protection policies that are more characteristic of a penal State

Political factors: new horizons and patronage-based practices

Bolivia has been described as “a country with a complex political culture, with a coexistence of democracy,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁵⁹ Rojas, B. “Sembrar para cosechar poco: balance de las políticas de empleo juvenil en Bolivia,” 07-07-2015.

⁶⁰ Rojas, C., *op.cit.*, p.88.

⁶¹ Explained, among others, by Sampson, Coleman and Wacquant.

⁶² The operating practice reflects a prioritization of objectives in the framework of State security and public policy, supplemented by the typical bias and interest of police institutions.

⁶³ Rojas, G. “Informe de la ONU. Bolivia encabeza lista entre los países de

Latinoamérica con más retardación de justicia,” in Eju! August 27, 2013.

⁶⁴ Office of the Ombudsman (2013) “Información relevante sobre personas privadas de libertad en el Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia”.

⁶⁵ *Barómetro de las Américas* (2012), cited in UNDP (2013) Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano 2013-2014. Seguridad Ciudadana con rostro humano: diagnóstico y propuestas para América Latina, New York, pp.146-147.

⁶⁶ Fundación UNIR, *op.cit.*, p.136.

authoritarianism, struggle and pact, direct action and the legal norm, conflict and consensus, the raising of complaints to the State without necessarily trusting it, the judicial prosecution of conflict despite the mistrust in the judicial system, the recurring use of social protest and conflict although they have not always proved effective.⁶⁷ How to explain such a contradictory social construct? A psychosocial interpretation argues that the colonial exploitation of Potosi silver made a mark on Bolivia's collective subconscious with an incommensurate fear of being deprived by outsiders, particularly foreigners, and a compulsive drive to 'make revolution' in order to erase the deep trauma of colonization - all of which may have a possible negative impact on policy-making.⁶⁸ From this viewpoint, it is worth revisiting an important precedent of the current change process: the 1952 National Revolution. As summarized by a specialist of that revolutionary drive, it: "nationalized the three major mining companies, performed a radical agrarian reform, established universal suffrage and strengthened workers' and farmers' unions, which came to hold key positions in Government and state-owned companies".⁶⁹ The subsequent decline was due, among other things, to the inherently poor management skills, the restrictive conditions of the labor market, the impact of internal divisions on the power dynamics, and ideological differences on how to address international challenges.⁷⁰

In the current context, all of these elements are present; some observers, while also noting minor differences, identify similarities with past political processes, arguing that the main source of inspiration of MAS policies stems from "Bolivia's old nationalistic tradition."⁷¹ In both moments of Bolivia's history, it was a State crisis that led to the fall of the political party system, allowing a significant emergence of new actors in institutional political spaces. There are striking similarities, such as "the appeal to unity of different classes and social sectors as 'one people', the identification of a common enemy that allows for the mobilization of the nation's forces in its defense, the cooptation of unions and other social organizations, and their division when they can no longer be controlled."⁷²

In the period from 1952 to 1957, this patronage-based scheme and the ensuing bureaucratization of union leadership eventually led to the preservation of a State structure that was based on class domination and the exclusion of marginalized social sectors. Similarly, during the second half of the MAS ruling period, it has been noted that "the standards of political organization of the previous representative liberal model have been maintained, with no

modification of the political structure, the representation style or partisan mediation as a prevailing means of representation."⁷³ This last characteristic distorts indigenous parliamentary representation, as their interests are deemed represented by the party's decisions.⁷⁴ What is particularly questioned by observers is "the inherently corporate spirit of MAS, which has defined not only its internal structure but also its political behavior (...) the needs and interests of those sectors involved in the capitalist economy - *cocaleros*, colonizers of indigenous territory, small farmers, unionists and carriers - have determined the scope of action for the MAS."⁷⁵ The idea of the common good yields to the individual interests of these unions and guilds, to the extent they manage to draw on their power resources which reside "on the one hand, in their capacity to influence the highest spheres of power (...) and, on the other, in their power to mobilize the grassroots to exert pressure on the Government."⁷⁶

Positioned amidst these dynamics of permanent struggle between sectors is the figure of Evo Morales, both President and union leader, at the heart of channeling, containing and decision-making in response to the demands from the various sectors. As described by a MAS representative, his block meets with Morales every Tuesday "or with the Vice-President, if he is not available, and they discuss the bills to be introduced and voted upon (...) so that there is no open discussion in the plenary session, and the bills are instead submitted and approved."⁷⁷ In some extreme cases of internal discrepancy, the party does not hesitate to punish dissidents.

Positioned amidst these dynamics of permanent struggle between sectors is the figure of Evo Morales, both President and union leader

As for its approach to identity claims, the MAS project differs from the revolutionary nationalistic movement of 1952. Indeed, the latter sought to "eliminate the Bolivian model centered on white-creole elites, and replace it by one based on the figure of mixed-race, thus putting an end to the inequalities prevailing in the country and moving forward toward constructing a nation of citizens."⁷⁸ This explains the little relevance attached by the workers' unions that led the 1952 revolution and today are focused on miners'

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.138.

⁶⁸ Boccara, B. (2013) "Bolivia: Revirtiendo traumas," La Paz: CERES/Plural editores, pp.38-39; p.62.

⁶⁹ Whitehead, L. (2009) "La última 'refundación' de Bolivia: ¿Qué tan original?" Crabtree, J., Gray Molina, G., and Whitehead, L. (eds.), Tensiones irresueltas. Bolivia, pasado y presente, La Paz: Plural/PNUD, p.292.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* pp.295-297.

⁷¹ Morales, J.A. (2009) "Bolivia en el Mundo: sus relaciones económicas internacionales," in Crabtree et al., *op.cit.*, p.258.

⁷² Quiroga, M.S. (2014) "El sector minero en perspectiva histórica: trayectoria del actor sociopolítico," in Quiroga, M.S. and Avejera, J., *op.cit.*,

p.21.

⁷³ Zegada, M.T. and Komadina, J. (2014) "El espejo de la sociedad. Poder y representación en Bolivia," La Paz: CERES/Plural editores, p.250.

⁷⁴ Chávez, P. (2012) "¿De la colorida minoría a una gris mayoría? Presencia indígena en el Legislativo," La Paz: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung/Editorial Gente Común, p.156.

⁷⁵ Quiroga, art.cit., p.20.

⁷⁶ Zegada and Komadina, *op.cit.*, p.225.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁷⁸ Fundación UNIR, *op.cit.*, p.30.

unionization, to an ethnic-cultural decolonization process: “their endorsement of indigenous claims is essentially emotional and circumstantial and does not reflect true acceptance of this transformation program.”⁷⁹ Instead, the identity claim that helped strengthen the MAS administration is rather based on a critique of the multiculturalism promoted since the 1990s, seen “more like a discourse proposed by the State, international organizations and intellectuals than as a true and effective form of recognizing cultural diversity.”⁸⁰ Hence, despite its contribution to social inclusion, the “plurimulti” discourse “also implied, for the very same reasons, a barrier to truly transformative indigenous claims.”⁸¹ Identity claims tend to lead to fragmentation, and hence their emergence in national politics since the year 2000 challenged the change proposed by MAS. Nonetheless, “given the failure of the indigenous movement to build a hegemonic ideological-political alternative (...) MAS managed to position itself as the representative of those national indigenous claims.”⁸²

The “plurimulti” discourse implied a barrier to truly transformative indigenous claims

As for the Plurinational State’s capacity to manage conflict, it may be noted that many of the recurrent management shortcomings that lead to the “incubation of conflict” result from a common practice of complacency and problem avoidance among government officials in the various areas and at different levels. It is often the case that a certain problem or conflict goes unsolved or unnoticed only because public officers resort to numberless strategies to elude the responsibilities they either should or could assume.⁸³ This probably results from the prevailing and deeply rooted culture of punishment in response to errors, mistakes or deviations from the norm.

SCENARIOS, OUTLOOKS AND CHANGE ACTORS

Conflict, radicalization and theories of change

Among the contradictory aspects of Bolivian conflict, radicalization and violence are worthy of a separate note. Historically, the scarcity of large scale violence in Bolivia’s democratic history has been attributed to a political *modus vivendi* built on alliances of power between weak elites and strong social actors. This has resulted in what may be described as an institutionalized popular constitutionalism,

whereby popular mobilization drives social change, which is subsequently incorporated by the popular State (e.g. in new legislation) and marks a new starting point for social conflict.⁸⁴ This form of doing politics “averts violence, but yet fails to address unsolved social and economic issues.”⁸⁵ A more focused reading of the present situation allows us to link the radicalization of many conflicts in Bolivia to the current distribution of powers, in which “the MAS has taken the center of the political arena, controls virtually every state institution, and has also managed to build efficient political mechanisms to control strategic social organizations (...and there are no political spaces that would allow a non-instrumental interaction between the State and civil society organizations”.⁸⁶

The mining activity in particular creates explosive conflict scenarios across groups of the same social class⁸⁷, most often arising from disputes over exploitation areas. These cases reveal a failure to adequately address the conflicting claims over mining areas, whereas the use of violence and radical measures – such as the occupation of mines or the taking of hostages – has proven a more effective means to claiming attention to demands. Both the past context of high international prices and their recent fall have been pointed out as factors fueling these sources of conflict.⁸⁸ From 2006 to date, there have been emblematic cases of disputes between mine workers from state-run mines and cooperatives, and between cooperative miners and the communities near the mines. The population of these local communities (especially in the case of gold mines) would pursue any chance of benefitting from the prosperity. Although these conflicts arise horizontally, the ruling party is involved with cooperative mining via its political alliances, bringing a significant number of privileges in the form of legal regimes. The recent clash between cooperative miners and the national authorities (August 2016) in which Vice-minister of the Interior Rodolfo Illanes was taken hostage and killed, was triggered by an intended withdrawal of some of these privileges by the government in response to economic recession, and is a clear example of the limits of such patronage-based political alliance.

The fact that these conflicts are becoming more radicalized and visibly contested in the public domain may contribute to their being addressed up-front. However, the violence and radicalization are also factors of diversion that hinder a thorough understanding of root causes and the possibilities of real resolution. This is the view shared by many observers, yet their understanding of the meaning of conflict for the building of relations between State and society diverge, resulting in conflicting views on the opportunities and priorities for change. On the one hand, there is the ‘generative and transformative’ approach which argues that the major issues to be addressed should be, first, the culture

⁷⁹ Quiroga, *art.cit.*, p.24.

⁸⁰ Zegada et al., *op.cit.*, p. 32, citing Bello (2004).

⁸¹ Fundación UNIR, *op.cit.*, p.31.

⁸² Quiroga, *art.cit.*, p.20.

⁸³ Rojas, C., *op.cit.*, pp.91-92.

⁸⁴ Gray Molina, G. (2009) “*Relaciones Estado/sociedad en Bolivia: la fuerza*

de la debilidad,” in Crabtree et al., *op.cit.*, pp.126; 135-138.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁸⁶ Komadina, *op.cit.*, pp.6; 9.

⁸⁷ Rojas, C., *op.cit.*, p.65.

⁸⁸ Avejera, J. (2014) “*La veta del conflicto: una introducción*,” in Quiroga and Avejera, *op.cit.*, pp.8-9.

“in which it is both customary and common to resort to social pressure”⁸⁹ and which is characterized by a ‘zero sum mindset’ where one of the parties wins and the other necessarily loses. Second, the typical patterns that characterize the incubation, manifestation, radicalization and dissolution of conflicts never result in a long-lasting solution due to the inadequate management of such conflicts.⁹⁰ This approach calls for the enhancement of both strategic and tactical management of conflict. An improved strategic management should lead to “progressive and steady improvement in the performance and operation of economic, social, political and institutional subsystems”,⁹¹ and a ‘repurposing’ of the State-society relation, with fewer dispute mobilizations and demonstrations. An enhanced tactical management would activate and empower the skills and mechanisms needed for the “prevention, resolution, post-conflict evolution and productive dialogue.”⁹²

Another approach is the view that social mobilization and pressure should not necessarily be reduced, given that such disputes for resources of power essentially lie at the heart of State-society relations. As such, they imply a range of direct actions of varying degree and intensity⁹³. According to this interpretation, conflict is “socially useful, because it is precisely during critical times that resistance (to change) yields, giving way to new possibilities of transformation.”⁹⁴

Actors, conflict dynamics and potential for change

Both perspectives for conflict transformation allow for the identification of players and dynamics which could potentially either help or hinder the changes needed for a less violent society, social justice and long-lasting peace. In this regard, a short analysis is in order of how Bolivian society has responded to two of the major conflict factors of special relevance today: the economic outlook and the prevailing instrumental use of deterrence and containment tactics in managing social conflict. This analysis is broken down in three parts in this section, respectively focused on the citizens’ major role in a) critical research, b) social movements and c) the range of organizations, groups and non-governmental networks. Each part ends with a summary of conclusions which serve as the basis for a set of tentative recommendations.

(a) Critical research

As pointed out above, the steadily increasing currency inflows from the export of raw materials constitute conflict drivers at various levels, while the permanent availability of liquid resources also helps prevent, mitigate, neutralize and postpone conflict. Critical observers argue that to generate a structural and sustainable change, public revenues need to be put to better use, and point to the need to refocus the national economy to redefine its priorities. This would firstly entail diversification: empowerment of job-generating

industries and the production of food for domestic consumption; and secondly, the industrialization of currency-generating industries to generate greater capital gains. In time, this would allow for a reversal of Bolivia’s current dependence on raw material exports, international demand and pricing, transnational companies, agribusiness industries with transgenic products and imported foods. This could create the conditions for a systemic progression and improved strategic management of conflicts, by gradually resolving or mitigating high-impact conflicts related to the access and distribution of resources and livelihoods. From a mid-term perspective, concerns have been voiced about the

Critical observers argue that to generate a structural and sustainable change, public revenues need to be put to better use

possibility of an imminent exhaustion of gas reserves, which currently generate virtually half of the country’s exports and thus fulfill a key stabilizing role. A 2013 forecast based on official proven reserve data, domestic consumption and export commitments estimated that failing greater investment in new exploration, Bolivian gas could run out towards 2020.⁹⁵ A previous study estimated that the sharp reduction in the certification of proven gas reserves from 2005 to 2010 was essentially due to the excessive exploitation of fields with a view to fulfilling the export commitments agreed with Brazil and Argentina.⁹⁶ Perhaps as a response to these warnings, the 2015-2019 five-year plan of the state-owned company YPFB provides for significant investments in new gas reserve exploration; and since 2015 the Bolivian media have reported on newly discovered oil and gas reserves which, according to the media, would suffice “to guarantee supply to 2025, both for export markets and domestic markets.”⁹⁷

Although critical independent research has contributed in many different ways to the national debate, several important issues still go partially or entirely overlooked. For instance, as in other parts of the world, few dare inquire about the hidden ins and outs of the cocaine business and its ties to the licit economy. Another issue seldom approached with a critical eye is the vigorous governmental campaign aimed at getting Chile to recognize Bolivia’s alleged right to an access of its own to the Pacific coast. In this case, the public debate over the past decades has shown a clear nationalistic trend towards normalizing sea access claims as ‘naturally’ belonging to the collective Bolivian identity. This has led the population to dismiss from the outset any allegation that Morales’ administration, just like others before his, might be

⁸⁹ Rojas, C., *op.cit.*, p.83.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.84.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.140.

⁹² *Ibid*, p.106.

⁹³ Zegada (2014), *art.cit*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, according to Morin, E. (2002).

⁹⁵ Arze, C. (2013), *op.cit.*, p.7.

⁹⁶ Rodríguez, G. “Están matando a la gallina de los huevos de oro”[online], Petropress, No. 23, 14-03-2011), Cochabamba: CEDIB.

⁹⁷ Hugo de la Fuente, former superintendent of Hydrocarbons, in: “*Expertos: para vender gas a Perú se precisan más reservas,*” Página Siete 25-06-2015.

using this high-impact issue tactically to appeal to the collective conscience at a particularly sensitive time, either to divert attention from certain internal issues or to neutralize conflicting feelings on those issues.

The role of critical researchers:

The observations, alerts and questioning of the way the national economy is managed evidence the importance of enabling a strong permanent presence of critical and independent research. This would contribute to enriching and strengthening the change process by way of constructive citizen oversight of such management by the government as well as other emerging topics on the country's political agenda.

(b) Social movements

In the tactical management of structural causes and categories of conflict (for example, those arising from extractive activities on indigenous lands, cost of living or labor conditions), the Bolivian government often resorts to instruments for co-optation, divisive measures and threats. The co-optation of leaders or organizations allows the government to turn overt strategic enemies into allies, while other measures seek their weakening by directly or indirectly attacking their opponents' allies and/or alliances. A pact between the MAS and Bolivia's Central Workers' Union (*Central Obrera Boliviana* - COB) in the period leading to the 2014 elections reflected the co-optation of an entire movement deemed of strategic value in terms of its potential (or risk) to promote a greater change. The agreement arranged for the incorporation of five high-level union leaders on the MAS representatives lists, just in time to renew the ruling party's control over a player of considerable political weight and with a history of struggle which just one year earlier had mobilized a wave of demonstrations throughout the nation with countless demands related to salaries and retirement rights.

However, a more recent case shows the limitations of this kind of co-optation. In April 2015, just a few days after municipal elections, the top leadership of the Federation of Neighbors' Associations (*Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto* - Fejuve) of the city of El Alto urged grassroots organizations to demonstrate against the direct appointment of deputy mayors by the mayor elect. In the past, the subsequent mayors of El Alto (all of them members of the MAS) had allowed their deputy mayors to be designated by local leaders, "who choose them by way of underground agreements in every district, with the participation of presidents only".⁹⁸ This led to patronage-based practices and 'quotas' for municipal administrative positions which were brought to an abrupt end with the recent election of the new mayor of El Alto, a candidate from the opposition.

Leaders of neighborhood organizations have blatantly failed in their attempt to mobilize their constituencies, because the

latter no longer believe in them, and "mechanisms for coercion in the form of fines and sanctions no longer work to convoke them."⁹⁹ In this way, the once-strong social movement¹⁰⁰ that lost its leaders' commitment to the collective cause and, with those, its anti-establishment identity, received a clear signal from its grassroots constituencies, who have turned into new potential actors for change that can regain the autonomy, *raison d'être* and relevance of the social movement.

The emergence of organizations such as the (national) COB and the (local) Fejuve in their anti-hegemonic capacity, challenging a pre-established order, poses an interesting question: Where are the actors with the capacity to generate the counter-powers required for constant renovation and strengthening of the democratic change process¹⁰¹? There are those who argue that only "indigenous and mid-left sectors still continue to behold the flag of the decolonization project,"¹⁰² and it is worth noting that it was precisely these actors that over the last few years have turned into strategic targets of a series of divisive and threatening measures by the Bolivian government and allied social movements. For example, in the final days of the indigenous demonstration to defend the TIPNIS in 2012 (see above), political forces associated to the MAS conducted a much disputed replacement of the highest leaders of the CIDOB, the federation of indigenous organizations coordinating the protest. The ensuing occupation of sites and offices ended up dividing the organization into two parallel indigenous federations: an 'official' CIDOB associated to the MAS and an 'organic' autonomous CIDOB.

Leaders of neighborhood organizations have blatantly failed in their attempt to mobilize their constituencies

In December 2013, the CONAMAQ followed. The CONAMAQ was the western indigenous federation that had assumed an ever more critical position against government policies during the course of the TIPNIS conflict and as a result of its own experiences with the incursion of extractive industries in their communities. The political and communicational maneuvers aimed at interfering with the operation of both structures continue to date, and have had a significant impact on their organizational capacity and working conditions. Nonetheless, these indigenous movements, and the regional and women's organizations which are part of them, have an extensive range of resources of their own to continue to shape the path they have chosen as anti-establishment referents. Considering the accelerated impulse of policies and rules benefiting extractive industries and facilitating the incursion of

⁹⁸ David Ali Condori, former Fejuve leader in El Alto, Bustillos, I. "El Alto, crisis de una organización social en el poder," La Razón 13-06-2015.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Fejuve from El Alto played a key role in the demonstrations leading to

the removal of Sánchez de Lozada in 2013 and Carlos D. Mesa in 2015 (see above).

¹⁰¹ According to Rosanvallon, *op.cit.*

¹⁰² Quiroga, *art.cit.*, p.24.

transnational companies in 'protected' indigenous lands, the future seems to hold in store multiple sources of conflict, both new and old, which will require these movements to resort once again to their significant collective leadership capacity and mobilizing experience.¹⁰³

The role of social movements:

The responses by strategic social movements to patronage-based and co-optation practices, on the one hand, and the use of instruments such as political division and threats, on the other, validate the need for permanent oversight and renewal of grassroots authorities and forms of leaderships, to safeguard collective capacity and identity as central and essential agents of the change process.

(c) Political space for NGOs

In certain extreme cases, threatening actions against civil society by the government have gone as far as judicially prosecuting social protest. Moreover, it must be noted that they do not only strategically target 'hard-to-convince' social leaders or movements, but also those that support them. An emblematic example has been the expulsion of the IBIS, a Danish NGO that had been in the country for years. In December 2013, the Bolivian government blamed IBIS for encouraging the division among indigenous movements such as CIDOB and CONAMAQ. The public apology published by this Danish NGO in response to that "did not have much of an impact, and instead seems to have contributed to institutions and organizations adopting a low profile showing low levels of public opposition or questioning, just as the Government wished."¹⁰⁴

Actions against civil society by the government have gone as far as judicially prosecuting social protest

NGOs in particular have been the victims of relentless official questioning. In August 2015, a few days after four Bolivian centers engaged in independent research on critical topics on the national agenda were accused by the vice-president of lying to favor foreign interests,¹⁰⁵ president Morales stated "(...) there is not much poverty, so there is no reason for the existence of NGOs. Now the State is present in all regions,"¹⁰⁶ and "any NGO or foundation

interfering with the exploration of natural resources will have to leave Bolivia."¹⁰⁷ These statements of the two highest leaders of the Bolivian government reflect an extremely closed position faced with the possibility of a frank and consensual interaction with newly consolidated or emerging anti-hegemonic forces. This constitutes a serious constraint on any possible initiative to enhance the tactical handling of conflicts, while increasing the need for such initiatives.

However, it must be noted that in this latter case, contrary to what IBIS did, the organizations involved, as well as their allies and the networks to which they belong, rose to their own defense and to the defense of citizens' rights to freedom of speech, freedom of expression and labor association. The director of the National Union of Institutions for Social Action Work (Unitas) not only denounced the blatant exercise of state control over the process of mandatory renewal of legal persons registration ordered in 2013,¹⁰⁸ but she also expressed her position that those declarations against the four NGOs constituted a threat to "the people of Bolivia, that benefits from the support of these organizations through the execution of several projects (...and against) the participation of all citizens (...)"¹⁰⁹

The role of non-governmental organizations and networks:

The evolution of intimidation against independent and critical organizations discussed above reflects an urgent need to operate collectively to protect the legitimacy and undisputed legality of autonomous citizen action, and to guarantee optimum conditions for quality work, strategically related to the dynamics of change and the diversity of actors involved.

¹⁰³ The renewed government support to gas and oil exploration implies an expansion of extractive activities in indigenous lands. The decrees adopted to make this expansion possible have increased from 6 to 11 the number of protected areas (out of a total of 22 currently in existence) compromised by hydrocarbon exploration and production activities. These new decrees have also constrained the rights of indigenous peoples to consultation prior to the performance of these activities ("*Cedib: actividades hidrocarburíferas afectarán al 17% de áreas protegidas*," published in *Erbol* 21-06-2015.

¹⁰⁴ "Antropólogo Xavier Albó: El MAS fomentó la división en la CIDOB y el

CONAMAQ," in *Erbol* 21-05-2014..

¹⁰⁵ Accusations of Bolivia's vice-president against the CEDIB, Fundación Tierra, CEDLA and Fundación Milenio.

¹⁰⁶ "Morales cuestiona existencia de ONG tras reducir la pobreza," in *Opinión* 21-08-2015.

¹⁰⁷ *Erbol* 21-06-2015, *art.cit.*

¹⁰⁸ Until August 2015, only 250 out of the 2,176 NGOs in Bolivia had managed to renew their legal status.

¹⁰⁹ "Unitas: 250 de 2.176 ONG lograron renovar su personería jurídica," in *El Diario* 12-08-2015.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINDINGS

The analysis presented in the preceding section identifies needs and opportunities for three different types of contributions by the organized society to Bolivia's change process; these could in turn contribute to optimizing the handling of social conflicts. The following may be read as recommendations to guide possible strategies for citizen action:

- 1.- The need to facilitate optimal performance of the role of *critical and independent research* in support of permanent constructive citizen oversight over the implementation of the change process and the key issues on the national political agenda.
- 2.- The need for *social movements* to safeguard their collective identity and capacity to remain key agents in shaping the change process, through ongoing review and renewal of leadership positions and 'grassroots' representation.
3. The need to operate collectively to protect the legitimacy and legality of *autonomous citizen action* and guarantee the conditions for quality work, strategically associated to the dynamics of change and agents involved.

It is noteworthy that although these needs have been presented separately, they constitute an intertwined set of factors that condition social change. Meeting them requires ongoing processes that can address them holistically, with the participation not only of the actors identified above but

also of every state and non-state agent involved in the change process in Bolivia and/or in a position to influence such process. Additionally, one of the greatest shared challenges for citizen action is determining the best strategic use of the several resources already available to Bolivia's society for handling conflicts in an improved manner (with or without external support).¹¹⁰ That being the case, the situation just described, and, particularly, the closed-minded attitude of the Bolivian government and its reluctance to a possible dialogue with alternative political forces, leads to two final recommendations:

- 4.- The need to create effective and permanent ties between those in oversight, monitoring, analysis and research roles and those involved in representing citizens in the participation and social control mechanisms provided for in the constitution that have slowly begun to operate. The articulation of these two functions would allow enhanced exercise of social control towards the goal of rebalancing relations between the governors and the governed, and would contribute to creating better strategic management of conflict.
- 5.- The prioritization of the local (in particular the municipal) level in the selection of contexts and scenarios for the introduction of programs, spaces and actions that can allow for an enhanced handling of conflict (prevention, resolution, post-conflict and productive dialogue). While the conflictual positions are entrenched at the level of the national political arena, this is not necessarily the case locally, and actors at that level may be more willing to contribute to a true transformation of social injustice and the resulting level of conflict in Bolivia.

¹¹⁰ Some resources include, among others, past experiences evaluated, training programs, established multi-stakeholder deliberation spaces and the support of multilateral organizations. One organization with permanent training and established practices for the handling of conflict is Fundación UNIR (www.unirbolivia.org). A meeting space that UNIR recently helped

promote, the Community for Dialogue and Conflict Transformation - Comunidad de Práctica de Diálogo y Transformación de Conflictos, publishes an interesting collection of documents in its website (www.conflictividad.org.bo).

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GPPAC Alert

Theo Roncken is a psychologist and coordinator of Acción Andina – Bolivia, a platform that, together with social sectors, promotes action research initiatives on the impact of globalization and local responses to its phenomena and policies (see: www.accionandina.org). Acción Andina is a member of the **Latin American and Caribbean Platform for the Prevention of Armed and/or Violent Conflict and Peace Building (PLAC-Paz)**, a regional network affiliated with GPPAC.

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Acción Andina

Casilla 5471
Cochabamba
Bolivia

www.accionandina.org
info@accionandina.org

Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)
Global Secretariat

Laan van Meerdervoort 70
2517 AN The Hague, The Netherlands
The Chamber of Commerce number is 4121740T
+31 (0)70 311 0970 | F +31 (0)70 3600194

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