

Agrarian South Network Research Bulletin

May — Aug 2024

"Latin America faces the challenge of Balkanization"

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EDITORIAL: Latin America faces the challenge of Balkanization

One of main developments in world geopolitics in the transition to the 21st century was the emergence of the so-called “pink tide” in South America; the collapse and crisis of liberal governments gave rise to the emergence of governments that expressed various forms of criticism of neoliberalism. Very divergent political expressions, such as indigenism, nationalism, slum movements, retirees and a significant segment of the urban middle classes served as a political basis for the development of a political cycle of unprecedented transformations. The personalities of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela (1999-2013), Lula in Brazil (2003-2010), the Kirchners in Argentina (2003-2015), Evo Morales in Bolivia (2006-2019) and Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2007-2017) were joined by the progressive turn of the Partido de la Concertación in Chile (Lagos and Bachelet governments) and the Frente Amplio governments in Uruguay (Tabaré Vázquez and Mujica). Under various modalities, some more radical and others more moderate, the policies of these administrations focused on income redistribution, recovery of public assets, regional integration and the recognition of popular rights of various kinds.

The turbulence of the world economy since the 2008 crisis revealed many of the limitations of these projects, mainly the structural dependence on foreign capital and agricultural commodity prices. The lack of resources was addressed through strategies of retreat from change agendas or through the radicalization of political action. The results were quite conclusive; during the second decade of the new century, right-wing parties

took power throughout the region, whether through popular vote, coups d'état, the use of lawfare and political deception. The notable exceptions of Venezuela and Bolivia to this conservative restitution are subject of this issue.

García Linera (2022) characterizes the current state of global liberation struggle as a liminal time, where the inability to reproduce the current political order is combined with the nonexistence of horizons of change that contain the demands and respond to the problems of the working people. Faced with this, the response of putrefied neoliberalism in Latin America has been the ultimate and total commitment to deepening tensions, opening the floodgates to its most extremist referents and expressions and to the construction of a scenario conducive to political violence. The main societal tool used is social networks, experimenting with a new type of alienation based on the rhetoric of hatred, disinformation and the trivialization of facts (what the new philosophers of misery call “post-truth”). On the political level, alliances with conservative and military sectors are becoming more widespread, in addition to the international alignment with Trumpism and the European extreme right. Faced with this scenario, the various progressive and popular political expressions act defensively, if not as mere observers, broadening their coalition base by approaching political sectors and groups in the center and right, and limiting their capacity for proposals and innovation.

The social basis of this political situation, for its part, remains the generalized

semi-proletarianization of the working classes on the periphery of the system. Within the latter, Latin America was the continent that inaugurated the trend towards rural exodus. But, after sixty years of this phenomenon, a proletariat comparable to the one existing in the systemic center was not produced. On the contrary, after reaching the peak of proletarianization in the twentieth century, what happened is the enlargement of the population that, no longer holding the means of production, can no longer rely solely on the wage relationship for its social reproduction. It must combine it, even in urban areas, with self-employment, production of use values and care. Therefore, monopoly capital removed workers from the countryside, but could not, and will not, offer them the possibility of reproduction according to the division of labor and the purchase of labor power (Yeros, 2023).

Given the contradictions of senile capitalism in the late neocolonial stage, there is no alternative to the disconnection from the law of value and state planning and promotion of development subordinated to popular interests (Amin, 1990). For this reason, imperialism will fight with all its might to suppress any example of a radical alternative for national liberation, which explains the general attack on Latin American projects.

Contributions of this issue

Amanda Harumy takes the bird's eye view of the political processes in Latin America, taking special attention to different left alternatives, the neoliberal reactions and the emergence of the far right. The author

also sheds light to the phenomenon she calls the "Boric Syndrome", an allegedly progressive form of anti-nationalism that echoes the imperialist agenda and delegitimizes the radical political processes, specially the Bolivarian process. Diving into the latter, Harumy argues that Chavismo has managed to empower the population during decades of mobilization and active participation. For that reason, it has, contrary to the Boric Syndrome, so far been able to resist imperialist and internal elitist attacks.

Mauro Berengan analyzes the recent results of this year's presidential elections in Venezuela in light of the hegemonic dispute over the construction of meaning around the Venezuelan process. The regional right's block response to a new reelection of Nicolás Maduro comes hand in hand with a selectivity of the media agenda and the positioning of the extreme right as a force of unity in the local opposition. All this in light of the new economic and geopolitical situation that Maduro faces, more favorable on various levels, after a decade marked by economic war, the unity of the right and the American blockade.

For their part, Jazmín Valdivieso and Fabio Castro analyze the government of Luis Arce, the unity candidate formed by the MAS and other Bolivian political spaces, after the coup d'état of 2019. The authors refer to the opening of a new political cycle in the country, differentiated and in tension with the "process of change" led by Evo Morales. Economic challenges (both historical and new) have set in motion popular discontent and the president's political limitations to build consensus and solutions. Added to this

is the fracture of the party (in a palace internalism without trenches that has Evo Morales as its main instigator) and the growing media role occupied by right-wing infiltrators in the movement and in the government.

Finally, Yael Ardiles focuses on the phenomenon of the electoral victory and the first months of the libertarian Javier Milei's administration in Argentina, a novelty in the region due to his profile and agenda. Milei is interpreted as an emerging conjuncture,

deeply linked to the communicational and subjective transformations of the post-pandemic, but above all as a response to social weariness in the face of economic instability (particularly inflation) and the polarization that reigned in the country for almost a decade and a half. In addition to the sweeping cuts in public spending, security policy and unrestricted alignment with the new global right are highlighted as the main coordinates of an experiment that, for the moment, is sustained with high popular support.

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The break from the Progressive Tide and to the new right in Latin America: the Venezuela of 2024

Amanda Harumy

The movement of power relations in the geopolitical world has had an accelerated behaviour in recent decades. Latin America and Africa are historically dependents of these center of power changes. We can say that they translate in political boards of international and imperialist interests and disputes; in this way today both regions are in dispute for influence from various forces in the context of the systemic transition towards the multipolar world.

The Latin American progressive wave, which began in 1998 with the government of Hugo Chávez, represented a common cycle in the region for more than a decade. The weakening process of that cycle begins with the coups in Honduras (2009) and Paraguay (2012). It deepens yet more with the consolidation of strong neoliberal projects with Mauricio Macri's victory in Argentina (2015) and the coup against Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (2016), which gave space to fiscal austerity projects such as the "One bridge to the future" by Michel Temer (2016). A new moment then begins in the region, which is characterized by an interval from the progressive wave and a constant dispute for the future situation.

Another important and common phenomenon in Latin America in this time was the rise of a new, even more complex right: a far-right with a popular character, with support in society, but against the people. This phenomenon had already been experienced before in

Colombia with the government of Álvaro Uribe, but it became a reality in the region as a whole with the emergence of leaders like Jair Bolsonaro, Javier Milei and Nayib Bukele. It is necessary to understand the nuances, complexities and disputes that span the Progressive Wave interval; there is no linear or hegemonic scenario, but rather a constant dispute over the future trajectories, coupled with effervescence and political escalation.

This far-right promotes a growing antagonism towards governments that implement popular and socialist projects, such as the Venezuelan Bolivarian process, led by Hugo Chávez and continued by Nicolás Maduro. This is a point of confrontation and political and social resistance in the region. Maduro's reelection in 2024, validated by the Venezuelan Supreme Court, was promptly challenged by opposition sectors and their international allies, although without concrete evidence of fraud.

The region is in a dangerous moment that includes destabilizing reactions against governments challenging neoliberal structures, often marked by antidemocratic speeches and narratives, questioning of the polls, manipulations, fake news and attempts at "civil" coups, manipulated and managed by a dangerous social media influence machine. Venezuela, in particular, is a constant target of delegitimization campaigns by part of the right, with the support of the international media and conservative governments in the region, such as that of

Javier Milei, in Argentina. These pressures, articulated with severe and criminal economic sanctions, seek to undermine the popular support to the Bolivarian government.

The economic blockade consists of sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies. Venezuela faced a dramatic drop in its petroleum revenues; considering that it has the largest oil reserves in the world, it can be said that the sanctions directly impact the world oil market. The country has suffered a 99% reduction in revenue from 2012 to 2020, due to international trade restrictions of oil, its main economic source. Even under that structural pressure, the Maduro government, in recent years, has advanced with a economic program that resulted in a gradual recovery of the economy. Superficially speaking, the sanctions have driven forced internal development, strengthening the national production of food and basic industry, which led to a reduction in inflation. Also, it is fundamental to highlight that, in the face of the cruel blockade of Venezuela by the USA, countries such as Russia, China and Iran maintained their relations and political, social and economic cooperation with the South American country.

The analysis of the political movements in the region suggests that the instability created by international pressure and internal dispute with the far-right in Venezuela has led to the development of the so called “Boric Syndrome”. This phenomenon, present in progressive sectors, represents a progressive discourse that, in practice, reconciles with the neoliberal agenda, and does not confront the imperialist structures. Countries that experience

internal contradictions and disputes, but that insist on producing a progressive form of anti-nationalism, criticize the Bolivarian process in Venezuela and align themselves with the imperialist narrative that delegitimizes the social achievements of Bolivarian socialism.

This Boric Syndrome, besides having a superficial political view, uses the liberal democratic discourse to question revolutionary processes under imperialist attack. It ignores the crucial role of sanctions and the international pressure in the Venezuelan crisis. In reality, the Bolivarian Revolution has a lot of political capacity because it deeply transformed the Venezuelan society, empowering the poorest classes and promoting active political participation through the 1999 Constitution, which innovated by introducing participatory democracy and a more active role for communities in the political decisions.

Many fail to understand the capacity of people power, built by the communes and by the entire Bolivarian process, to maintain its support base, even in the most critical moments. This popular support is one of the reasons why *Chavismo* continues to win elections, including in 2024, when Maduro got 51.02% of the votes. The opposition, led by figures such as María Corina Machado, representative of an international elite and of the wealthiest classes in Venezuela, preferred to adopt a fraud narrative, even without presenting concrete evidence. That pattern of contestation of the electoral results has been one dangerous phenomenon in the region.

The “Boric Syndrome” phenomenon also manifests itself in other countries in Latin America, where

sectors of the left prefer to adopt a more moderate discourse, avoiding direct confrontations with imperialism. This is visible in governments such as that of Boric, in Chile, which searches a progressive path without completely breaking with the neoliberal economic structures. However, this distancing from the most radical struggles leave these governments vulnerable to pressure from economic and political elites, who take advantage from the lack of mobilized popular basis to destabilize them.

In Venezuela, the Bolivarian process, contrary to many progressive governments in the region, chose to directly confront the elites and build a model alternative to neoliberalism. This included the expropriation of companies, the redistribution of lands and the creation of community self-management mechanisms, which empowered the population and strengthened resistance against attempts at destabilization. Popular support for *Chavismo*, even in times of economic crisis, reflects the political consciousness built in decades of mobilization and active participation in the political process.

Venezuela has become a symbolic battleground in the struggle between different governance models in Latin America. *Chavismo's* resistance to international sanctions and internal opposition demonstrates the potential of popular projects when manage to mobilize and politicize the working classes. At the same time, the Boric Syndrome reveals the fragility of progressive projects that avoid directly confronting the established power structures, opening space to destabilization and setback.

Hegemony and dispute of meanings in the face of the Venezuelan elections

Mauro Berengan¹

In response to a question from my students, knowing from my research on the Venezuelan process, I asked in class how many knew the president of Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, the neighbors of my country Argentina. Nobody knew them. In the first country, the former president was prevented from participating in the elections and lives abroad without being able to return, while the young current president ordered the invasion of an embassy to arrest a foreign representative. In the second, a president that no one voted for came to power in a long period of instability leaving dozens dead in the process. In the third country the former president reached 7% support, while about three dozen protesters were killed and several hundred lost their eyes. The count would be endless: in Brazil the former (and current) president was arrested just a few years ago and prevented from participating in the elections for allegedly having received an apartment as bribe, in the country with the sixth largest GDP in the world at that time. In the US, the losing president denounced fraud, did not recognize the elections, his supporters invaded the Capitol, there was repression and deaths, the results took weeks to be certified, voting takes place on Tuesdays with millions of workers prevented from attending and with a rather indirect system where a president can have more votes and lose the election. Angela Merkel governed for 16 years, in Mexico or Paraguay the government of a single party was not far from a century. In Argentina, the two-time president was initially prevented from participating in the elections, in addition to

having a revolver pulled to her forehead (not to mention that we have a president who openly and on his “theoretical” bases simply does not believe in democracy, and a vice president who defends genocidaires and vindicates the last military dictatorship). Today, in this same country, standing in front of Congress is sufficient reason for socially endorsed repression.

The classroom, however, ignoring all this, knew Maduro and Chavez, and with a unanimous value load. Power is disputed in the battle of positions, step by step, in the construction of meanings of what exists, of what is good, of what is possible. Elections are only a movement. The networks today are flooded with comments about Venezuela from those who are accustomed to being oblivious to the political or social development of any latitude. The hegemonic operation behind it is then quite evident. What to see and what not to see, what to know, what to learn and what to ignore are determined, and with it their value loads already imputed in the very visibility of the process.

The prevailing hegemonic order carries out a discursive construction towards the Venezuelan process, granting it a massive existence and reversing all measures. From here in Buenos Aires – where it is forbidden to protest standing in front of Congress by a law that is clearly contrary to the national interest – opposition mobilizations in Caracas, which include burning down

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hospitals and all kinds of destruction that usually frighten so much, are positively valued, electoral processes which are not ignored or even known anywhere else are ignored, those who are terrorists here are constructed as heroes, the blocking of streets and roads is legitimized, parallel presidents are accepted without complaint and coups d'état are welcomed in the name of democracy (as also in Bolivia in 2019, a coup initiated by alleged electoral fraud). If the discussion is about Venezuela, a candidate cannot be impeded in her political rights for endorsing an attempted coup d'état, recognizing a parallel president outside the constitutional order, calling for the famous "guarimbas" or requesting the activation of the TIAR to endorse an external invasion in her own country.

This is unfair, profoundly unfair. And perhaps in this battle the first trench is to show this injustice. The few progressive media in Latin America and many of their spokesmen – perhaps pressed for time, perhaps by hegemony – simply spoke of electoral records, of how "it is difficult to believe such a result" and that's it. Little has been said about the historical process of the Bolivarian revolution, little about the opposition, little about this injustice was said. If we start talking about every process of the left on the defensive, cornered, singled out, accused of our mere existence with negative assessments that no one else is accused of, it will be very difficult.

In this context, and in a strategy repeated over and over again in the Venezuelan dispute, the narrative of electoral fraud was imposed long before the election: either Maduro loses or I don't believe in the elections, and that's it; let's spare ourselves the hundreds of testimonies on the subject

just to remember that Mauricio Macri made a call via former Twitter to the Venezuelan Armed Forces inciting action against electoral fraud before the results were known (can you imagine this in other countries, with other presidents?). Again, speaking only of electoral records without considering this previous narrative, already established, already definitive, with a long history in each Venezuelan election, omitting any other element, is a sign of the triumph of a position prior to the movement.

The "world citizen" was already convinced that Maduro could not win. A few hours after the announcement (made like every announcement in Venezuela) irrefutable evidence was demanded in a timely manner that no one would care about if it were the case of other processes with other ideologies; I believe I have already exemplified this. The information that reaches us, that we manage to incorporate, adds to this chain of meanings. The expressions of desire become reality.

The hegemonic desire is that Chavismo does not exist in Venezuela or, at least, that it is a minority and defeated expression. In an almost parody act of subrogation, in which the candidate who would obviously win barely read a piece of paper for 20 seconds, Marina Corina Machado maintained that the election was around 70-30, only to assert the next day that Chavismo had obtained just over 2 million votes.

"Hard to believe" was the title of a note by a well-known Argentine left-wing analyst on the result given by the CNE in which Chavismo would have obtained just under 6 million votes. Which version is, then, more "credible"? Let me say that, for all that is

stated here, it is not important, no one will be convinced of anything by it, but we leave here some elements written previously (that is to say based on what is expected by those who follow the process) to the elections:

- The economic situation has changed since the last election, in which Maduro certainly won. The country is growing (8 and 4% of GDP in two years), there are no shortages, income has been diversified despite the meager salaries, and through dollarization – whether sought or not – and other mechanisms such as the Special Zones and internal and external “black market” trade, a stability was achieved that controlled inflation, bringing it to a historic low at this point. Thus, the (currently diminished) confidence in the future is growing.
- I emphasize: confidence in the future is crucial in a dispute for hegemony and even more so in a transition process (and/or its sorrows). The perception of a possible project articulates, produces combative ardor, invites action, to take a risk because one believes. This popular feeling that had been lost is perhaps being recovered, even partially.
- The government is in much better shape than in the last election. Events such as the appointment of Ángel Prado as minister, the embrace of Elías Jaua on stage and the openness to dialogue with other sectors, add to a dispute – with highly questionable methods – over the representativeness of other parties and spaces of the left. These

expressions manage to show, for the first time in many years, an "absolute" unity of Chavismo.

- The opposition came into the elections in a worse state. Far from the large mobilizations of 2017 led by Henrique Capriles, or the opposition's control of Congress after the 2015 elections and the international support for the "parallel president" Juan Guaidó, the anti-Chavez opposition is today led by a referent of the liberal and insurreccional extreme right (the opposition was hegemonized by the wing that in other countries is questioned as outside the established framework).
- The process of removing Manuel Rosales from his candidacy was overcome but astonishing. Marina Corina Machado, in her carnal connection with the US, had requested the invasion via TIAR, was involved in expropriations of assets abroad and all kinds of maneuvers denounced as corrupt by other opponents. With the preference for this last option, the possibilities of the opposition to close ranks with a moderate proposal, which implied a candidate with a track record and local power (in the most populous subnational State), were annulled.
- The candidate finally imposed shows a notable weakness, like a Biden from the south, with no experience other than in diplomatic relations, alien to Caracas and Venezuela as a whole, with little ability for oratory (even to transmit something), with anti-

charisma in a Caribbean country, which is no small thing.

- The international perception of Maduro is not what it was a few years ago either; he is less of a dictator than before. He has established links and concessions with the global north (particularly with the US), also guaranteeing Chinese-Russian capital and other Arab business. The pressure is less. The international media had largely forgotten him until shortly before the elections, when old international detractors returned, even from the old world. Quite a contrast.
- The capacity for mobilization has also been strengthened. Unity is also evident (beyond what actually happens) in the streets. Chavismo has always known the importance of the war of movements against a background of war of positions, and knows how to concentrate and advance with all its forces on an objective when that is what is needed. The PSUV is a well-oiled electoral machine, with a gigantic territorial deployment today associated – at least temporarily – with other grassroots organizations.

I add: at its peak electoral moment, the opposition obtained 7.3 million votes, just below Chavismo. In 2018, when the hegemonic sector of the opposition did not participate in the process, Chavismo lowered its flow to 6.2 million, while those who participated against the government obtained just under 2 million.

In this election, Chavismo would have obtained between 5.5 and 6 million votes (the announcement was 5,140,092 without 100% of the votes, but with an irreversible trend of 80%, following what was announced by the CNE) and the opposition close to 5 million (it was announced 4,445,978). Thus, in an incomparably better economic situation than in 2018 (beyond the continuation of so many hardships), with a strengthened government and a favorable geopolitical situation (China and Russia have returned to invest in Venezuela, after fleeing in the face of workers' benefits and labor laws; and they returned after liberal flexibilization measures undertaken by the Chavista government; even Chevron works in the country today), with an opposition with open and fierce disputes during the previous months and being hegemonized by the most radical wing, and certainly with a migration that diminished its electoral base... what should seem more credible? That Chavismo has dropped to 2 million votes, a third of what it had in a worse position, and the opposition has far exceeded its historical heights? Or that Chavismo has obtained practically the same as in its last election, and the opposition a little less? Well, the first option is more credible simply because what is believed is already believed, because the triumph is prior to the movement, because logic and empiricism have less and less place.

In another note prior to the elections, I have analyzed and described both the government and the opposition in their historical development and their necessary criticisms. I think that at this time the most urgent thing to raise — at least outside Venezuela — is this discussion. They say that in Venezuela a crucial battle is being played out for both geopolitics and the global left. This may be so, but I think that another

crucial battle is being played out: that of the very possibility of disputing meanings with solid argumentative bases, with the appropriate variables, with certain empirical support, with cause-effect relationships. Around the construction of a “homo virtual” new foundations are being built for the perception of the world, supported by meanings far removed from modern thought (also questionable and already under discussion from its positivist bases) that produced great advances for humanity. We must also dig this trench.

An Indigestible Reflux for the Bolivian Process of Change: Crisis and Uncertainties of a Social Reordering Period

Jazmín Valdivieso¹
Fabio S. M. Castro²

Abstract: This paper examines the current political crisis in Bolivia, characterized by economic instability, social unrest, and a fracturing of the traditional leftist movement following the 2019 military coup. It contextualizes these developments within the broader "process of change" from 2006 to 2019, highlighting the contrast between past stability and present uncertainties. The analysis focuses on issues such as inflation, fuel shortages, and the government's response under Luis Arce amidst a backdrop of rising right-wing sentiment. Additionally, it explores the role of new media in shaping political discourse and the depoliticization of critical social issues, including poverty and human rights. Ultimately, the paper argues that the ongoing political vacuum presents both challenges and opportunities for the left, urging a reevaluation of strategies to effectively engage with grassroots movements and broader societal concerns.

Introduction

Writing about the current political situation in Bolivia is not an easy task. The country has found itself deeply enmeshed in a historical process characterized by prolonged struggles against colonization, which are still ongoing, perhaps reaching its most urgent moment. Furthermore, Bolivia is experiencing a particularly

challenging socio-historical-political conjuncture that is difficult to diagnose. Consequently, we observe a notable decline in strong expressions of leftist militancy, whose previously clear and systematically articulated horizon of struggles has now been shattered and nuanced by complex diversionisms.

In this context, we aim to write with impartiality, yet far removed from any claim of neutrality. This moment is ill-suited for political timidity, and the interpretative exercise presented here does not shy away from its critical responsibility; the answers we seek to uncover emanate from a popular voice that seems to escape even the confines of traditional media.

In Bolivia, there are highly active political thermometers present in popular spaces such as markets, public transport, and healthcare centers, among others. In other words, responses emerge from the streets, with political practitioners—who may not be political scientists, historians, or sociologists—but have learned to accurately gauge the country's conditions, as there is no better lens than that of those fighting for their daily bread.

"October is approaching," can be heard in murmurs. This time of year has become iconic in this country's history, as in past Octobers, significant mobilizations and revolutionary processes took shape, demonstrating the people's capacity to

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topple governments by taking to the streets.

With a basic goods basket inflated by nearly 20%, irregular dollar circulation, and constant instability regarding the purchase of gasoline and diesel, general malaise is already palpable. All of this emerged like a ticking time bomb following a "failed coup d'état" on June 27, 2024—a situation that lasted no longer than two hours but transformed into a genuine collective panic with economic repercussions and social insecurity.

Bolivia is a nation accustomed to political instability, as history has shown; however, this is a novel instability, arising after years of apparent calm characterized by stable prices, regular fuel supply, and continuous movement of both the dollar and the national currency. We refer to the so-called "process of change" between 2006 and 2019, which represented the period of greatest stability in the nation's history.

Crisis is No Fairy Tale; It's What Our Wallets Say

In 2019, after a military coup and the return of the right to power amid a global pandemic, it was historic to return to the polls in October 2020 with a glimmer of hope. Democracy was on parade as popular voters sought new lights to recover their autonomous national project, all the while guarded by armed soldiers.

However, popular will is not always the vector of change. The first to sound the alarm regarding this new reality were business leaders, who, in meetings with the president elected by the people and his ministerial cabinet, proposed the liberalization of exports. In this meeting, 17 agreements were signed, including the need to continue seeking and approving

external financing (debt), and contributing to exports with financing, etc. The new government found itself pressured by a country devastated by a military coup and a business sector eager to regain its colonial privileges.

The central government claims that the lack of dollars in the country is due to international financial speculation orchestrated by the elite commodity producers. However, the reality is that the situation has become unsustainable. It has been over a year since the exchange rate has fluctuated between 7 and 15 bolivianos, leading to a critical situation given that Bolivia is not self-sustaining in its production system, relying instead on the import of essential goods to meet the basic needs of its population.

The crisis is not only economic but also political. It is evident that within the government and its ministerial cabinet, the difficulty in finding reasonable solutions for the country is acute. In a single week in July 2024, ministers of Hydrocarbons, Labor, Rural Development and Lands were replaced. The political tension arising from the state apparatus is also emanating from social organizations, which form the support base of the Movement toward Socialism (MAS - Movimiento al Socialismo), to which Arce belongs. He was chosen to replace the process's maximum leader, Evo Morales, following the coup d'état.

On August 6, 2024, amid silence and long lines at all gasoline and diesel distribution centers in the country, Arce made what could perhaps be seen as his final play in the political contest that opened during his administration, proposing the convening of a national referendum to conduct three public consultations:

1. Should the subsidy for hydrocarbons, in effect in Bolivia since 1997 and modified in 2004 with leveling, be maintained? Currently, a liter of gasoline costs Bs 3.74 and diesel costs Bs 3.72 - prices that have not changed for nearly two decades.

2. Should the number of parliamentary seats, currently at 130, be increased?

3. What is the possibility of the president and vice-president being re-elected continuously or discontinuously? Currently, an elected president may only be re-elected once successively; however, they may compete again for elections non-consecutively.

These possible consultations in the referendum have provoked various opinions concerning the decision-making process. First, while the nature of Bolivian democracy has been configured as a kind of dual power where governance occurs alongside the co-governance of organized social movements, some decisions are the exclusive responsibility of the executive, such as subsidizing hydrocarbons. Secondly, the question regarding parliamentary seats was defined in a popular assembly; and finally, the issue of re-elections is clearly directed at his political contest with Evo Morales, not to mention that this issue already possesses its internal regulation.

If all of this were not enough, amidst the previously mentioned context, Bolivia is currently facing one of the greatest environmental disasters in its history, with fires in natural reserves that have already consumed 4 million hectares to dateⁱ. The primary cause? Fundamentally, agroindustry. The dalliance with private enterprise has its consequences.

Mimetism Between the Left and the Right

Who are the good guys, and who are the villains? Latin American politics often follows a script of heroes and villains. It is evident that such mythological figures do not exist, beyond what history will soon do with them, there is a significant way to protect the left that is through the identification of the enemy.

At a time when the depoliticization of politics seems to be the prevailing banner, the mediocre—more TikTokers than references—become the favorites, and this is the narrative that most politicians have well embraced. Thus, the discourse of both the left and the right is increasingly distant, with everyone appearing to be allies of the "noblest causes," which, in any case, is merely a disintegration of real struggles: sex freedoms, feminisms, entrepreneurship, and animal rights are among the most frequent agendas of politicians; leaving out: global poverty, inequality, self-determination, human rights, public health, etc., which have "ceased to be agenda items".

Additionally, this new communicational reality is mediated by the emotivity and immediacy of digital media that disseminate information and have the ability to revoke or position entire governments merely through the creation of trending content. In this context, Bolivia faces an explicit absence of the old and well-known right-wing groups, who, following the militarized coup of 2019, with a narrative of "democratically taking power," have turned towards passive profiles that cater to youth tastes, while the political party that has enjoyed stable support over the last 16 years, MAS IPSP, has fractured, presenting itself in two

factions: the Arce faction and the Evo faction.

In a generic discourse, one might understand it as a struggle between two lefts, but nothing could be further from the truth; something similar has occurred before in Ecuador with Correa and Lenin Moreno, yielding right-wing results in the name of the masses and populism. Bolivia's own history also bears a similar chapter, as the party known as the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), one of the parties that has remained in the national memory for its association with the nationalization of natural resources and agrarian reform, later degenerated into a space for the representation of one of the most hardline right-wing groups in the country, namely that of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada.

Today, the MAS has splintered at all levels, creating clear gaps for the entry of silent and sometimes cynical members of the right itself. What was once a commitment to liberate the people from the right and its policies now presents a rather confusing and hybrid face. Nevertheless, almost everyone still sings songs of protest and revolution in unison.

The Political Vacuum is the Perfect Moment for the Heist

It remains unclear who governs and who opposes; the truth is that there is unemployment, inflation of basic goods, import inflation, disruptions in local consumption, shortages of hydrocarbons, fires of international alarm, and, increased planning of external financing. With regard to the Socioproductive Community Economic Model, it can only be said that being a public administrator of a country is not the same as governing it. This is one of the worst moments for leftist militancy and there is a notable empowerment of a

camouflaged right, with individualized demands from each social sector and significant uncertainty in both the national and international markets.

References to extreme right agreements in neighboring countries should speak volumes; nonetheless, all that remains is to sow to create what money cannot. Hunger should not be an option, and the struggle and hope for fairer spaces should not be either.

The achievements of the MAS's 14 years of stability cannot be disregarded. Its foundation in the struggle for the nationalization of natural resources in the interests of the working people of the country and the longstanding demand for recognition of the country's plurinationality are embedded in society and cannot be reversed. However, the fractures between the directions to be taken, which opened this historical breach, need to be resolved in the same direction as their origins. The limits of a revolution have been reached, and it is necessary to sow the seeds for the construction of the future. No one fights for nothing. The people need to return to the streets, but for this, the destiny of the nation must be put to the test against the interests of a large part of the population that remains in indulgence.

The Arce government has proven that technocracy is incapable of managing a revolution, much less one based on a dual power emanating from social movements. Bolivia, is a country with an indigenous majority, a significant portion of the population that succumbed to the colonial system that has no other choice but to retake the reins of its future and pursue the deepening of sovereignty and self-determination.

This does not imply that Evo Morales is the automatic savior of the

nation. The crux of the matter is the need for a social reorganization rooted in organized labor and peasants movements, capable of charting a new path towards the *vivir bien* (living well). This necessitates a new unity pact among social actors,

ⁱ According to data from the Fundación Tierra. See: <https://ftierra.org/index.php/tema/medio-ambiente/1246-incendios-en-bolivia-arrasan-con-mas-de-4-millones-de-hectareas>.

ⁱⁱ In Andean Aymara culture, babies (*wawas*) are carried on their mothers' backs using traditional cloth wrappings known as *aguayo*. Beyond providing comfort, this practice holds significant

fostering the emergence of new leaders who can symbolize "walk in the present with the future on our backs"ⁱⁱⁱ. Currently, the nation is at a standstill, gazing around without a clear direction.

cultural meaning, related to the Aymara conception of time as circular—time is not perceived as linear in the sense of "past – present - future." In Aymara culture, time functions in cycles, where people walk facing the past because it is known and visible, while they turn their backs to the future because it is unknown and unseen. Consequently, *wawas* are carried on the back, symbolizing the future.

An interpretation of the libertarian conflict in Argentina

Yael Ardiles

With the arrival of the anarcho-capitalist phenomenon and its precursor Javier Milei building an electoral majority, Argentina deepened all the problems it had been dragging along after the pandemic and inequality increased rapidly in a matter of months. This scenario merits collective reflection, assuming that what is new about the crisis is the speed with which it unfolds. Like any social fact, the circumstances in which the Javier Milei phenomenon begins to unfold in Argentina are not completely new, but are inherited from the recent past. That is why it becomes necessary to differentiate structural tendencies from conjunctural movements, to identify the true capabilities of the new phenomenon and not attribute false characteristics to it.

a) The so-called digital revolution transformed the instruments with which society produces and reproduces itself. Personal computers, the World Wide Web (the global computer network known as the Internet) and cell phones became the pillars of a new sociability, with different times and spaces, and forms of representation of reality that changed the parameters of expected logical movements. This new reality overwhelmed society's perception, while giving voice to those who did not have one in analog society: an opinion or a fact can circulate and go viral with a spontaneity that was unforeseen two decades ago.

b) The acceleration and intensification of ICTs put political and social forms of intermediation in crisis. This

goes beyond the sole function of journalism; finance also spread through platform economies; science and technology were framed behind another pattern of knowledge production, innovation and patenting; technology diversified and integrated other links in the production chain, giving rise to industrial complexes that operate internationally. The digital revolution, tied to the capitalist system, enabled new forms of mobility and value generation. Politics could not assimilate these transformations in an orderly manner: the cases of electoral manipulation of big data during Brexit or the elections of Trump, Bolsonaro and Macri are clear examples of this.

c) Therefore, the problems of contemporary democracy - as described by Przeworski, Horowitz and Ipar - partly derive from the above and are juxtaposed with problems of another order. Following these authors, the public debate starts from a base in which public education acquires an irreplaceable social role. We see then that this minimum base is deteriorated due to the liberal educational reforms promoted by Carlos Menem in the 1990s, three decades ago.

d) Given all this, the conceptual framework in which the political struggle is taking place has been transformed. Some fractions of the ruling class, incapable of proposing an alternative project for the country, do not base their support for Milei on new or old theories or on the dynamics

of the libertarian counter-hebemonic battle (such as the one that Marxism waged in opposition to liberalism). The current struggle is articulated in a dynamic of exception, that is, of open war: cognitive – economic – psychological – political war, where the attributes that grant the legitimacy that any social order requires have been transformed.

The world that was formed during more than forty years of neoliberalism in Argentina, on which Milei relies to govern, is being imposed despite the contradictory exceptions. From there derives the crisis of "the truth" that we know in modern society and, consequently, the crisis of science as an intermediary of the parameters of truth.

e) An increase in citizen participation in public opinion can also be observed. ICTs have closed the gap between the private and public lives of political leaders, conditioning the political system in general when it comes to validating or challenging leaders, especially those who are not coherent with what they say and do. And if, currently, the Argentine political system is undergoing a crisis of legitimacy, it has more to do with the corporate, corrupt nature and the excessive ambition of our ruling class than with the vicissitudes brought about by ICTs.

f) The debts of the new democracy also influence this crisis of legitimacy. During the 1945-1975 cycle, the working class managed to appropriate between 42 and 48% of Argentina's GDP, but since the establishment of the current democratic cycle in 1983 until 2023, workers have not exceeded the gains of 25% of GDP. If democracy does not serve to transform this

inequality, among others, politics loses meaning because participation does not change the unjust reality that we have to live with every day. Since the recovery of our Rule of Law in 1983, the horizons of Argentine democracy have been largely limited to respect for procedures, largely suggested and reformed by international organizations. In this sense, citizen disaffection is reflected more, for example, in the low union participation and not so much in electoral participation, which fell almost 10 points compared to the historical record in 1983.

Current movements

In this general context, we propose that Javier Milei's electoral victory at the end of 2023 opens a new political cycle in Argentina. A political cycle in which the correlation of forces that ordered the struggle between 2001-2015 has changed. Since 2015, the Argentine economy has been stagnant, while politics has been dominated by ungovernability and a catastrophic tie between the forces of Kirchnerism and Macrism, where the ruling classes have not been able to propose an orientation to society. Faced with this political incapacity, Javier Milei emerges as a representation that articulates a widespread rejection of these two expressions. Milei articulates a big "NO".

A recently published report states that in the first five months of Javier Milei's government, the purchasing power of wage earners fell by between 20% and 40%, while business owners increased their profits by up to 800% compared to the previous year. The libertarian agenda, consisting of a

brutal fiscal adjustment, the absolute deregulation of the internal market - always bordering on the absurd and bizarre - and the preservation of most restrictions on international trade, has developed in a context of high social support and almost no socio-political conflict. The limited response from politics, the working class and the general public is quite a novelty for this country, known for its long tradition of mobilization and organization.

Considering the short time of his administration (started in December 2023), the precarious organizational structure of his political party (La Libertad Avanza) and its limited parliamentary representation, Javier Milei managed to drive the public agenda, positioning himself as an antagonist of progressivism (social democracy). The series of attempts to approve state and fiscal reforms, the delegated functions that the president aspires to achieve and the deregulation of all activity coming from foreign capital, forced the majority legislative parties to remain on the defensive and without the capacity for initiative.

The legitimacy on which the libertarian crusade is based comes from a very relevant discursive and political construction. Milei speaks to the new working classes that have existed in Argentina long before he became president; the “precariat”, the unregistered workers who lack basic labor rights, collective bargaining or union representation. Within these groups there is a hard core that expresses high levels of adhesion and political-ideological support, made up mainly of young men between 16 and 35 years of age from middle-class homes. But he also gathers support in popular working

sectors, which migrated their support from Peronism and Macrism. Added to this is what, so far, is seen as a virtuous and dangerous complement to his vice president, Victoria Villarreal, of the extremely conservative and nationalist profile, being well regarded by sectors linked to the armed forces, whose agenda of denying state terrorism and defending repressors and genocidaires of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) opens the doors to an uncertain and dark horizon.

It remains to be seen whether Milei will seek to direct this support towards a hegemonic bloc in the government, which would have a practical correlation in the management of institutions and forms of governing. Or whether, on the contrary, his objective will be limited to “destroying the State” and acting as an “agent of chaos”, as he calls himself.

This is not the first time that structural reforms of the State have been implemented in Argentina. During the period 1991-1996, the Peronist party managed to implement the Washington consensus agenda in public institutions by making use of the political strength it managed to build in the territories, sectors and areas of government. However, the second cycle of reforms that it attempted to promote was carried out under a politically weak coalition, which failed miserably, leading to the social explosion of 2001. For the moment, Milei managed to make the institutions work thanks to his incipient personal political capacity, but without an apparatus behind him.

In addition to the deep reforms, shock measures and economic restrictions,

the main policies being developed by Milei's government include security, intelligence services and its particular approach to foreign policy. In terms of security, coordinated actions have been developed with the US, a national scenario has been built riddled with hypotheses of internal and external conflicts, and the repetition of the narrative of the war against drug trafficking that circulated in the 1990s. In this framework, the conditions were created to restrict street mobilization and social movements were stigmatized, which is why marches are not present in public spaces.

Perhaps the least obvious but highly relevant impact has to do with the reactivation of the domestic intelligence agenda, largely deactivated by the previous government of Alberto Fernández. The media-judicial operations that transcend the new and traditional media are unprecedented. The financing and return to clandestinity of the intelligence services, added to the anonymity of social networks, support the government's narrative about "the caste" and citizen anger against politics and politicians. The government manages to dismantle the (sterile) reputation of opposition leaders of the political class, in the absence of other types of power apparatuses, a model similar to the one used by Putin when he rose to power in Russia and confronted the mafia.

Milei's foreign policy is one of the most controversial dimensions of the new era. His moves are governed by an ordering assumption: since there is a crisis on the national scale of politics and the sovereignty of States, foreign policy should not depend on formal meetings or on the search for and preservation of the values of multilateralism. First, there is an unrestricted alignment with the State of Israel, the network of liberal and conservative governments in Europe and with Donald Trump in the United States. On the other hand, Milei does not meet formally with other leaders, exposing his contempt for the political class as a discourse of international positioning, while prioritizing establishing relations with leaders of technological companies and promoting direct relations (and eventual access to investments through informal agreements) with these figures.

With less than a year to go before the national legislative elections, Milei's government hopes to once again secure an electoral majority that will allow it to strengthen its influence in parliament and finally introduce all the reforms that had to be postponed. This would be a real paradox in political terms, since we would be witnessing the suicide of the State in the hands of the government.

