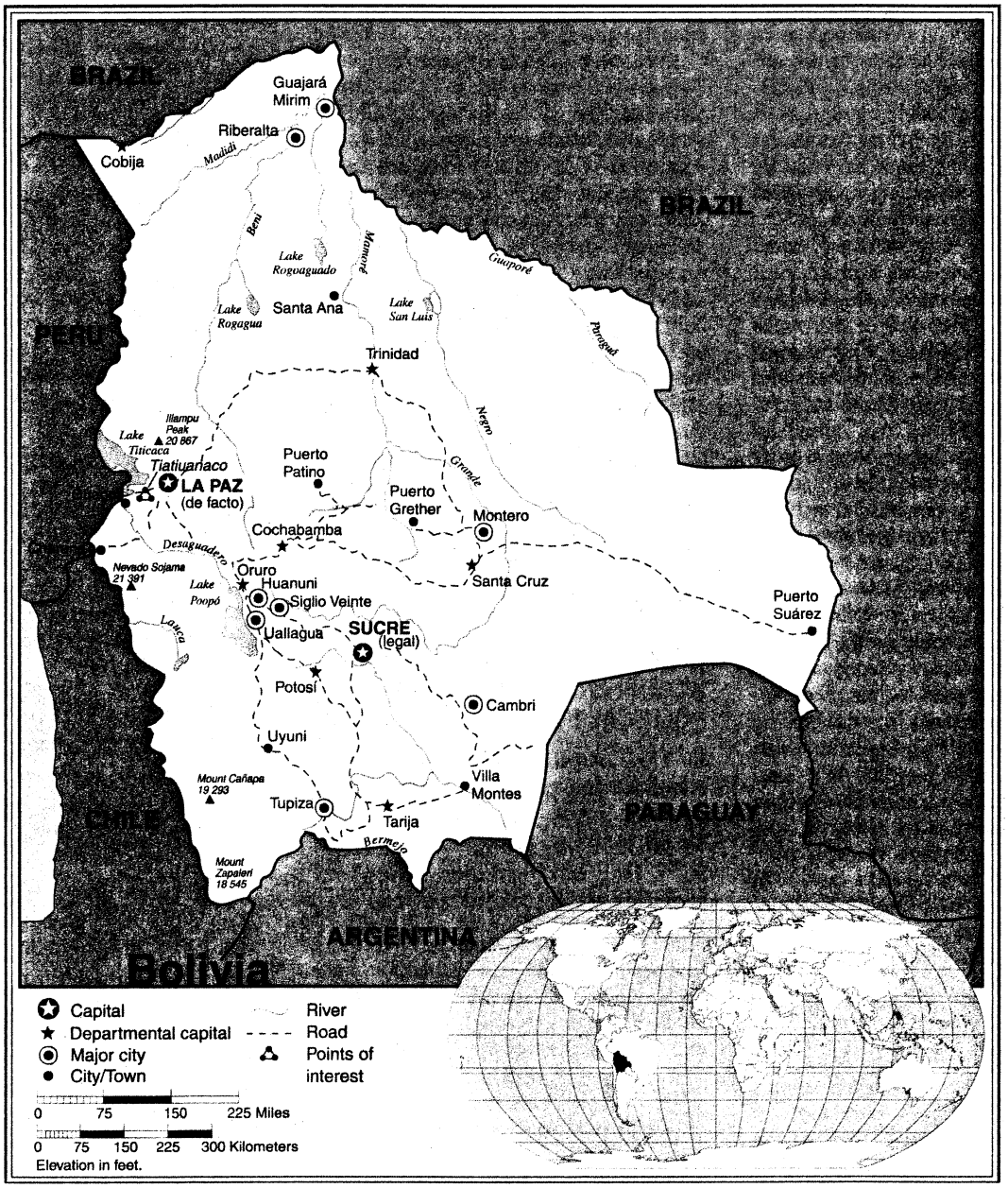
Bolivia (Republic of Bolivia)



Bolivia Statistics

GEOGRAPHY

Area in Square Miles (Kilometers): 424,162 (1,098,160) (about 3 times the size of Montana)
Capital (Population): La Paz (de facto) (1,000,000); Sucre (legal)
Environmental Concerns: deforestation; soil erosion; desertification; loss of biodiversity; water pollution
Geographical Features: rugged Andes Mountains with a highland plateau (Altiplano), hills, lowland plains of the Amazon Basin
Climate: varies with altitude; from humid and tropical to semiarid and cold

PEOPLE

Population

Total: 9,119,152 (2007 est.)
Annual Growth Rate: 1.42%
Rural/Urban Population Ratio: 39/61
Major Languages: Spanish; Quechua; Aymara
Ethnic Makeup: 30% Quechua; 25% Aymara; 30% Mestizo; 15% white
Religions: 95% Roman Catholic; Protestant

Health

Life Expectancy at Birth: Male: 63 years Female: 69 years
Infant Mortality Rate (Ratio): 50.43/1,000
Physicians Available (Ratio): 1/3,663

Education

Adult Literacy Rate: 86.7%
Compulsory (Ages): 6–14; free

COMMUNICATION

Telephones: 646,300 main lines
Daily Newspaper Circulation: 69 per 1,000 people
Cell Phones: 2,421,000
Internet Users: 580,000

TRANSPORTATION

Roadways in Kilometers (miles): 62,479 (38,823)
Railroads in Kilometers (Miles): 3,504 (2,177)
Usable Airfields: 1,061

GOVERNMENT

Type: republic
Independence Date: August 6, 1825 (from Spain)
Head of State/Government: President Evo Morales is both head of state and head of government
Political Parties: Movement Toward Socialism; Free Bolivia Movement; Movement without Fear; Nationalist Revolutionary Movement; National Unity; National Democratic Power; Social Alliance; many others
Suffrage: universal and compulsory at 18 if married, at 21 if single

MILITARY

Military Expenditures (% of GDP): 1.9%
Current Disputes: dispute with Chile over water rights; seeks sovereign corridor to the South Pacific Ocean

ECONOMY

Currency ($U.S. Equivalent): 7.54 bolivares = $1
Per Capita Income/GDP: $4,400/$12.8 billion
GDP Growth Rate: 4%
Inflation Rate: 12%
Unemployment Rate: 8%; underemployment
Labor Force: 4,793,000
Natural Resources: tin; natural gas; petroleum; zinc; tungsten; antimony; silver; iron; lead; gold; timber; hydropower
Agriculture: soybeans; coffee; coca; cotton; corn; sugarcane; rice; potatoes; timber
Industry: mining; smelting, petroleum; food and beverages; tobacco; handicrafts; clothing
Exports: $4.259 billion (f.o.b.) (primary partners United Kingdom, United States, Peru)
Imports: $3.107 billion (f.o.b.) (primary partners United States, Japan, Brazil)

SUGGESTED WEB SITE

http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bl.html

Bolivia Country Report

BOLIVIA: AN INDIAN NATION

Until recently, the images of Bolivia captured by the world's press were uniformly negative. Human-rights abuses were rampant, a corrupt and brutal military government was deeply involved in cocaine trafficking, and the nation was approaching bankruptcy.

Other images might include Bolivia's complex society. So intermixed has this multiethnic culture become that one's race is defined by one's social status. So-called whites, who look very much like the Indians with whom their ancestors intermarried, form the upper classes only because of their economic, social, and cultural positions—that is, the degree to which they have embraced European culture.

DEVELOPMENT

Although nationalistic policies have stifled private investment, the government now enjoys a fiscal surplus, after years of deficits, because of greatly increased revenues as a result of higher taxes on mining and hydrocarbon exports. Inflation reached double digits in 2007.

Another enduring image fixed in the literature is Bolivia's political instability. The actual number of governments over the past 200 years is about 80, however, and not the 200 commonly noted. Indeed, elected governments have been in power for the past two decades. What outsiders perceive as typical Latin American political behavior clouds what is unusual and positive about Bolivia.

One nineteenth-century leader, Manuel Belzu, played an extremely complex role that combined the forces of populism, nationalism, and revolution. Belzu encouraged the organization of the first trade unions, abolished slavery, promoted land reform, and praised Bolivia's Indian past.

In 1952, a middle-class–led and popularly supported revolution swept the country. The ensuing social, economic, and political reforms, while not erasing an essentially dual society of "whites" and Indians, did significantly ease the level of exploitation. Most of the export industries, including those involved with natural resources, were nationalized. Bolivia's evolution—at times progressive, at times regressive—continues to reflect the impulse for change.

THE SOCIETY: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS

Bolivia, despite the rapid and startling changes that have occurred in the recent past, remains an extremely poor society. In terms of poverty, life expectancy, death rates, and per capita income, the country ranks among the worst in the Western Hemisphere.

Rights for women have made slow progress, even in urban areas. In 1975, a woman was appointed to the Bolivian Supreme Court; and in 1979, the Bolivian Congress elected Lidia Gueiler Tejada, leader of the lower house, as president. Long a supporter of women's rights, Tejada had drafted and pushed through Congress a bill that created a government ministry to provide social benefits for women and children. That remarkably advanced legislation has not guaranteed that women enjoy a social status equal to that of men, however. Furthermore, many women are likely unaware of their rights under the law.

Bolivia's press is reasonably free, although many journalists are reportedly paid by politicians, drug traffickers, and officials to increase their exposure or suppress negative stories. A few journalists who experienced repression under previous governments still practice self-censorship.

URBANIZATION

Santa Cruz has been transformed in the last 50 years from an isolated backwater into a modern city with links to the other parts of the country and to the rest of South America. From a population of 42,000 in 1950, the number of inhabitants quickly rose to half a million in the mid-1980s and is now growing at the rate of

(Courtesy of Jorge Tutor)

Bolivia has a complex society, tremendously affected by the continued interplay of multiethnic cultures. The influence of indigenous peoples on Bolivia remains strong.

about 8 percent a year. Bolivia's second largest city, its population now exceeds that of the de facto capital, La Paz.

Most of the city's population growth has been the result of rural-to-urban migration, a phenomenon closely studied by geographer Gil Green. On paper, Santa Cruz is a planned city, but, since the 1950s, there has been a running battle between city planners and new settlers wanting land. "Due to the very high demand for cheap land and the large amount of flat, empty, nonvaluable land surrounding it, the city has tended to expand by a process of land invasion and squatting. Such invasions are generally overtly or covertly organized by political parties seeking electoral support of the low-income population." In the wake of a successful "invasion," the land is divided into plots that are allocated to the squatters, who then build houses from whatever materials are at hand. Then begins the lengthy process of settlement consolidation and regularization of land tenure. Once again the new land is subdivided and sold cheaply to the low-income population.

FREEDOM

A corrupt judicial system, overcrowded prisons, and violence and discrimination against women and indigenous peoples are perennial problems in Bolivia, despite protective legislation.

Perhaps the pace of urbanization as a result of internal migration is most pronounced in El Alto, which hardly existed on maps 30 years ago. It is now a "city" of 700,000 and overlooks La Paz. The rapid growth actually reflects a profound crisis in Bolivia. Tens of thousands of Aymara and Quechua-speaking miners and peasant farmers have been driven to El Alto by their inability to make a living in rural areas. Over the past five years it has become, in the works of a local newspaper editor, "the capital of social protest in Bolivia." In fact, a rebellion centered in El Alto succeeded in driving President Gonzalo Sánchez from power in 2003 and threatened to do the same to his successor, Carlos Mesa.

The character of what has been termed the "Ideology of Fury" is complex and springs from a broad range of contexts. Perhaps most important, Bolivia's indigenous majority has suffered centuries of neglect and abuse. President Mesa noted as much when he explained the uprising as an "eruption of deeply held positions, over many centuries, that have been accumulating." There appear to have been two more immediate catalysts: U.S. insistence on the eradication of coca and the government's proposal to export natural gas to the United States through the construction of a pipeline to Chile.

With respect to coca cultivation, Bolivian politicians for years have promised to put an end to the trade and substitute other crops such as pineapples, coffee, black pepper, oregano, and passion fruit. Unfortunately most of the government's efforts were put on eradication and not alternative development. The United States, according to economist Jeffrey Sachs, "has constantly made demands on an impoverished country without any sense of reality or an economic framework and strategy to help

them in development." The net result was the impoverishment of thousands of peasant farmers, who have since migrated to El Alto and become the taproot of the "Ideology of Fury." What was not appreciated by Washington and Bolivian politicians who were fearful of losing U.S. aid money, was that coca is central to indigenous culture. Certainly much is exported in the form of coca paste or cocaine. In the 1990s it was calculated that illegal exports contributed the equivalent of 13 to 15 percent of Bolivia's gross domestic product and that coca by-products accounted for as much as 40 percent of total exports, both legal and illicit. Today, about 400,000 Bolivians are estimated to live off coca and cocaine production. U.S. wishes run afoul of the multifaceted heritage of coca, the sacred plant of the Incas. There is virtually no activity in domestic, social, or religious life in which coca does not play a role; thus, attempts to limit its cultivation have had profound repercussions among the peasantry.

HEALTH/WELFARE

Provisions against child labor in Bolivia are frequently ignored; many children may be found shining shoes, selling lottery tickets, and as street vendors.

Indigenous resistance to coca eradication now centers on Evo Morales, the head of the coca growers' federation, who emerged victorious in the presidential elections of 2005. Morales's new party, the Movement Toward Socialism, has undertaken the modification of the laws against coca cultivation, regardless of the wishes of the United States. "There has to be a change, to a policy that is truly Bolivian, not one that is imposed by foreigners with the pretext that eradication will put an end to narcotics trafficking," said a member of Congress and an ally of Morales. The president himself coined the phrase: "Yes to coca, no to cocaine."

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Bolivian author Armando Chirveches, in his political novel *La Candidatura de Rojas* (1909), produced one of the best examples of this genre in all of Latin America. The book captures the politics of the late nineteenth century extraordinarily well.

The second catalyst involved the proposed gas pipeline. While there are good historical reasons for Bolivian antipathy towards Chile (Chile deprived Bolivia its access to the Pacific as a result of territorial adjustments following the War of the Pacific in 1879–1880), resistance to the pipeline also has a social dimension. As reported in *The New York Times,* a Chilean pollster noted: "Part of the democratic process is assuring that people are going to get a piece of the cake, and that has been lacking in Bolivia. Bolivians are suspicious of whoever is making the deal because they think the "elite always puts money in its own pockets, and we are left on the streets with nothing to eat." Regionalism also plays a role in the controversy. Gas-producing regions, those with large deposits of lithium, and even farmers in Santa Cruz who have experienced a boom in soybean exports, now demand a significant voice in the distribution of the wealth they produce as well as a degree of autonomy from La Paz.

Regional tensions reached a boiling point in May 2008 when Santa Cruz voted on a statute to seek more autonomy from the La Paz government. One provincial legislator who helped draft the statute told a *New York Times* reporter: "We do not want the creation of another republic. But we do want control over our own destiny and our own resources." The statute, if implemented, would accord Santa Cruz the right to elect its own legislature, create its own police force, and raise taxes for public works. It would also allow the province to negotiate royalty rights with energy companies. Part of the drive for autonomy springs from provincial fears that the Morales government plans to break up large rural estates and redistribute land to migrants who have flooded into Santa Cruz from the impoverished highlands.

What is unfolding in Bolivia is the latest manifestation of a problem that has been brewing since the 1950s. Santa Cruz is the economic engine that drives the country and it is in this province that most of the nation's wealth is concentrated. La Paz and the highlands want a greater distribution of that wealth.

The success of the indigenous majority in Bolivia in toppling one government and then winning the presidency has both emboldened their leaders, who relish their new found power, and awakened a sense of racial pride among the Aymara and Quechua. As one unemployed carpenter told reporter Larry Rohter: "They may still say that we are only Indians, but now we can see what is happening and what the Aymara nation can do when it is united."

President Morales will now have to put his rhetoric into action if he is to mollify the demands of an awakened and angry indigenous population. It will be impossible for Bolivia to develop its extensive natural resources in the face of an indigenous and regional resistance that does not take into account their needs. If the government can link development to the creation of jobs, if it finally begins to deliver on years of unfulfilled promises with regard to health care and education, and if it can pursue a coca policy that respects the culture of the majority of the population and stems from Bolivian reality and not Washington's wishes, then perhaps a modus vivendi can be reached. If not, the future will bring further economic malaise and political upheaval.

Timeline: PAST

1538
Spanish settle the altiplano (high plain)

1825
Bolivian declaration of independence of Spain

1879–1880
The War of the Pacific with Chile; Bolivia loses access to the sea

1932–1935
The Chaco War with Paraguay

1952–1964
Reforms: nationalization of mines, land reform, universal suffrage, creation of labor federation

1990s
Privatization of the economy accelerates; labor unrest grips the mining sector
Bolivia's indigenous people achieve a new political voice

PRESENT

2000s
President Sánchez de Lozada forced to resign

Bolivia's indigenous majority demands economic, political, and social reform

Aymara leader Evo Morales elected president in 2005