CHAPTER 8

POPULIST RESPONSES TO CRISES OF MARKET DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF BOLIVIA'S EVO MORALES

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Populist movements emerge as responses to crises of representation whereby elites are incapable/refuse to respond to people's grievances (Arditi 2007: 56). Populism may thus be understood as a regular feature of politics, representing a subversive challenge to the status quo, and as a launching point for a reconstruction of a new order when the previous one has lost legitimacy (Laclau 2005: 177). Indeed, populism may be understood as part of a process of social transformation, a protective movement of society in response to the excessive expansion of the free market (Polanyi 1944).

Where the interests of the wealthiest sectors of society are organized into politics, while issues concerning popular classes are organized out, democracy loses legitimacy. Where left/right party-party differences narrow, popular indifference and distrust of parties and institutions grows (Mair 2013). Mistrust in the political system, alongside withdrawal from participation, opens space for a movement of opposition (Schmitter 2019: 152). As parties/politicians become detached from their traditional social bases, while inequality and socioeconomic precarity become entrenched, democracy is viewed by excluded sectors as a facade for the maintenance of elite privilege. Appealing to a sense of personal danger and a shared sense of political exclusion, populists may portray the political class as having failed, and likely to continue to fail, effectively barring citizens from any realistic prospect of a better life (Dunn 2019: 56).

Such a decomposition of legitimacy of the prevailing model of democracy occurred in several Latin American states around the turn of the millennium. Anti-system outsiders emerged where labour-based and centre-left parties were at the forefront of advancing neoliberal policies, a configuration found in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela (Roberts 2015). The adoption of neoliberal policies by centre-left parties caused party systems to converge

around variants of market orthodoxy, programmatically de-aligning partisan competition and channelling societal opposition into extra-systemic forms of social and electoral protest, thereby opening vacant political space for outsiders on the left flank of mainstream parties (*ibid.*)

Traditional parties "were perceived as instruments of local and foreign elites that implemented neoliberal policies and thereby increased social inequality" (de la Torre 2016: 64). As satisfaction with the economically and politically exclusionary market model of democracy sagged, waves of anti-neoliberal mobilization erupted. Protests represented a struggle for reincorporation, whereby excluded segments of society sought to (re)connect with state institutions, so as to gain access to rights the state failed to provide (Rossi & Silva 2018). Populist leaders successfully bound sectorial and group interests together by framing the grievances of women, Afro-Latinos, indigenous groups, urban and rural popular groups, informal workers and landless peasants, among others, as issues of democratic citizenship that the neoliberal-inspired market-democracy denied (Silva 2009). The populist nature of Latin America's outsiders refers to challenging political-economic elites, whose insider status is founded on the exclusion of other sectors of the national community (Roberts 2019). Populism in the Andes, then, should be understood as a response to a *crisis of too little democracy* (Brown 2020b), with popular blocs and populist leaders challenging the status quo of incorporation for a minority elite bloc and political and socioeconomic exclusion for the majority.

Unsurprisingly, such populist challengers triggered intense resistance from those sectors of society who had commanded, and benefited from, the market model. While left-led governments faced opposition blocs who demanded pro-market orthodoxy and a protection of pre-existing political/economic power distribution, they simultaneously faced pressure from organized popular sectors via social movements/unions/neighbourhood organizations for greater participation and improved living conditions. It is by grasping the nature of these varied and evolving power struggles that one can understand the advances and limitations of the reform processes. Moreover, analysing populist performance via such a relative power lens helps to shed light on the realities of actually existing populism, whereby processes may entail simultaneous democratizing and de-democratizing features.

Scholars from the liberal tradition describe how populist leaders such as Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa threatened democracy by challenging liberal norms. For example, Weyland (2013) outlines the ways these leaders eroded institutional checks and balances and marginalized the opposition through "discriminatory legalism". Levitsky and Loxton (2013: 109) describe these cases as being "competitive authoritarian", whereby democratic institutions exist and are used as the primary routes to power, but

incumbents then abuse state powers to skew electoral competition in their favour, to such an extent that an opposition's ability to compete is seriously compromised. Leaders in these cases were said to rely on "populist rhetoric" to build their political hegemony, before riding roughshod over democratic norms by boosting the power of the executive.

While liberal scholars decry the "hyper-presidential" nature of the "radical" left cases, anti-system outsiders in the Andes emphasized that entrenched political-economic elites blocked programmes for change, and hence they argued for a strong president who relied on "plebiscitarian appeals for popular support" so as to "counter the bias toward the status quo" (Munck 2015: 374). Illiberal populist responses to exclusionary, elite-dominated market democracy resonate with Slater's (2013) notion that democracies will careen between oligarchic forms and domineering populist forms as intense conflicts between partisan actors, deploying competing visions of democratic accountability, emerge. Populists will call for more substantial inclusivity or vertical accountability, while opponents will defend democracy for the constraints against excessive concentration of unaccountable power in the executive – that is, horizontal accountability. Such competing visions speak to the democratizing potentials and dangers of populism. While many theorists condemn populism as a threat to liberal democracy, Berman notes that "although it is certainly true that democracy unchecked by liberalism can slide into excessive majoritarianism or oppressive populism, liberalism unchecked by democracy can easily deteriorate into oligarchy" (Berman 2017: 30). It is useful, therefore, to appraise the impact of populists on democratic quality, not only in terms of respect for liberal norms, but also in terms of their success, or otherwise, of deepening and extending democratic quality by boosting the participatory and substantive incorporation of erstwhile excluded groups. The remainder of this chapter examines the emergence, development and potential legacy of the process headed by Evo Morales in Bolivia.

ANTECEDENT ERA: MARKET DEMOCRACY AND POPULAR RESISTANCE

A New Economic Policy was designed by the IMF and implemented under decree by Bolivian president Víctor Paz Estenssoro (1985–89). Currency devaluation, free-floating exchange rates and interest rate liberalization were adopted. Public sector spending declined, and state lending and subsidies to the mining and traditional agricultural sector were restricted. The "imposition of the New Economic Policy by 'shock treatment' caused profound economic and political exclusion of the popular sectors, deeply threatening their livelihood and leaving them without defences within established political institutions" (Silva 2009: 109).

In 1993, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada became president (1993–97) and adopted further neoliberal reforms that eroded the quality of political and socioeconomic citizenship for popular sectors. A privatization drive saw the majority of shares of publicly owned companies in energy, telecommunications and transport transferred to multinational corporations (Trujillo & Spronk 2018: 135). Massive job losses, subcontracting of work to non-unionized labour, the atomization of workers as factories were replaced by smaller workshops, and informalization all followed privatization. A shift in agricultural policy witnessed transnational corporations (TNCs) and large domestic agricultural enterprises, based in the *media luna*[1] departments, lead a drive to insertion in the global economy. Peasants lost land, credit and markets for their crops, fostering an urbanization of rural labour. Reductions or eliminations of subsidies to staple foodstuffs, utilities, fuel and transport worsened the economic exclusion of swathes of society, where poverty levels remained above 50 per cent in urban areas and 77 in rural zones. Policymaking was dominated by the interests of capital, guided by supranational agencies, and decisions were taken in a technocratic and unaccountable manner. Excessive use of presidential decrees, scant legislative debate and a lack of consideration for the interests, demands and priorities of subordinate social groups became the norm.

A wave of protest erupted during the presidencies of Hugo Banzer (1997–2002), de Lozada (2002–03), and Carlos Mesa (2003–05), as the presidents adopted economically exclusionary reforms without popular sector inclusion in decision making. During the Cochabamba Water War – a series of massive protests over a water privatization scheme in the city – popular protest movements began to forge links with political parties, particularly the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party headed by Evo Morales. MAS was a movement party in that it engaged in electoral politics and competed for office, while at the same time it engaged in extra-parliamentary struggles and bargaining in pursuit of a programmatic agenda. The MAS used the context of the Water War to adopt a "plural popular" (Albro 2005) strategy of coalition building, in which "indigenous issues became the framing plank for successful political articulation" (Anria 2013: 27). Morales, via the MAS, played a key role in coordinating among multiple groups – peasant organizations, cocaleros, urban labour unions, and urban neighbourhood organizations – by framing specific group or organization grievances as issues that emerged due to Bolivia's market democracy.

1. The term *media luna* (half moon) refers to the crescent shape formed by the boundaries of the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija, where the most conservative sectors of the political and economic elite opposition are located.

Following the 2002 election of de Lozada, under IMF-direction the government implemented economic stabilization policies, including income tax rises and a moratorium on public sector pay rises. In October 2003 residents in the city of El Alto coordinated enormous demonstrations when de Lozada's plans to give TNCs concessions to pipe Bolivia's natural gas to Chilean ports, for export to the US, were unveiled. The "terms of the concession to foreign capital, framed as a giveaway, turned the issue into a symbol of the popular sector's exclusion from market society" (Silva 2009: 134–5) and the wave of protests that engulfed El Alto and then spread across the country became known as the 2003 Gas War.

The government ordered the military to break up marches, with troops killing scores of civilians. The repression backfired. Mass protests erupted across the country calling for the president's resignation, with miners and protesters from Oruro and Potosí, coca growers from Chapare and peasants from the highlands converging in La Paz. A set of demands emerged, calling for the ousting of the president and his neoliberal model, as well as the nationalization of gas. With an estimated 500,000 people in the streets, de Lozada fled the country for exile in the US with vice-president Carlos Mesa taking over.

Mesa initially sought to appease mobilized popular sectors but, as economic elites increased pressure on him, and with the TNCs, IMF and US embassy allying behind the domestic elites, Mesa dropped any pretence of supporting popular demands (Gustafson 2020: 113; Webber 2010: 54). However, popular organizations at the local, regional and national levels coordinated protests, mobilizing hundreds of thousands of protesters, effectively shutting down the cities of La Paz and El Alto and forcing Mesa to resign.

During Mesa's presidency, "Bolivia was characterized by a deepening political polarization along the axes of class, race, and region" (Webber 2010: 52). Two social blocs emerged. First was a left-indigenous bloc, comprised predominantly of indigenous urban proletarian and peasant forces. The second bloc, which consolidated between October 2003 and June 2005, "was an eastern-bourgeois bloc led by the regional bourgeoisies of the hydrocarbons-rich departments of the *media luna*" (*ibid.*).

The convergence around structural adjustment policies by all the mainstream parties – including supposed leftist parties – and the backtracking on campaign promises by elected officials, meant that popular sector anger and aspirations were funnelled into extra-systemic forms of social and electoral protest. The MAS filled the void created by the decline of the traditional parties who were associated with neoliberalism. Morales and the MAS easily won the 2005 elections in the first round, setting the stage for new struggles between the competing social blocs around competing notions of democracy.

CONSTRUCTING POST-NEOLIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY PROCESS (2006–09)

Following the collapse of the traditional party system and the de-legitimation of the market model of democracy, in conjunction with the waves of anti-neoliberal protests coordinated by powerful popular organizations, Morales was elected to office with the ideological scope and popular backing to advance an alternative, post-neoliberal democracy. However, an opposition bloc cleaved around protection of the status quo and market democracy. In the political sphere, despite winning the presidential election and a simple majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the MAS did not control the senate or the conservative judiciary. Furthermore, opposition bloc politicians won control of the majority of departmental governments, including those regions where key sources of economic power lay (finance, agro-industry and hydrocarbons). They also dominated the ideological sources of power (media, churches), and wielded control over fascistic mobs (a form of military power) who engaged in violent repression of government supporters.

In June 2006 the government presented the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007 that called for a deepening and extending of democracy. The plan offered an alternative vision to that of market democracy and called for *buen vivir*, an indigenous vision based on communitarian forms of living together. The plan outlined that the state needed to intervene as "promoter and protagonist of national development", whereby the state would act to transform society and the economy, but only if "all peoples and cultures are present in the economic and political decisions of the state".

The plan was based around developing two sectors of the economy. The first comprised surplus-generating activities such as hydrocarbons, electricity, mining and natural resources, and the second was made up of employment- and income-generating sectors such as tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, transport and services. The plan called for revenues, generated through increased state control over the surplus-generating sectors, to be redirected toward the transformation of the employment-/revenue-generating sectors via state spending and redistribution, boosting internal demand and supporting social equality. Nationalization of primary commodity sectors was also to be used to develop the industrialization of primary materials (Arze 2016).

In May 2006, Morales declared that Bolivia's hydrocarbon sector was to be nationalized, so as to allow the state to increase the price of, and rents from, its natural gas exports. Via decree 28701, "the Morales administration recovered the state's right to commercialize its hydrocarbons and increased the prices it received from the sale of its natural gas" (Kaup 2010: 129).

As discussed in detail below, while the "nationalization" was in fact moderate, the changes represented a fundamental shift in the state's role in the hydrocarbon sector and boosted the fiscal capacity of the government.

The NDP plan to deepen popular sector voices in decision-making and to extend democratic quality, via increased state control over the economy and redistributive social policies, as well as indications that there would be a reform of land ownership, directly challenged elite interests. In response to the NDP, elites in the *media luna* engaged in a legal (via a supportive judiciary) and (often violent) extra-institutional struggle for regional autonomy, with the backing of allied media, in a bid to avoid the proposed changes to the status of private property rights, land reform and redistribution of state revenue.

While the opposition bloc pressurized the MAS from the right, powerful popular organizations pushed the MAS from below to advance the process. It is crucial to highlight that the MAS had both a core social coalition and a more autonomous bloc of movement organizations that engaged with it in a strategic alliance. The core was composed of an "inner circle" that included: the cocaleros; the Six Federations of the Tropics unions; the Bartolina Sisa National Confederation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Native Women of Bolivia (CNMCIOB-BS); and the Unitary Syndical Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB). The second strategic bloc included: the principal labour union, the Bolivian Workers Central (COB); public sector unions; urban informal sector workers organized in neighbourhood associations called the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations (FEJUVE) especially in El Alto; informal sector miners' unions, the so-called *cooperativistas*; and the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ).

In the tug-of-war between the opposition bloc and popular demands, with the government located in between, MAS was heavily reliant on defensive mobilization by the popular base to prevent elite destabilization tactics from succeeding. Having been elected on an anti-neoliberal mandate, with large-scale popular backing, and with powerful movements pushing the government from below, yet confronting a recalcitrant opposition bloc determined to block the post-neoliberal agenda, the Morales government justified bending liberal norms as necessary to weaken/overcome opposition.

For example, to combat the conservative bias in the judiciary, the MAS pressurized some sitting judges, including the chief justice of the Supreme Court, by filing criminal charges against them. According to Sánchez-Sibony (2021), the MAS-government denounced the judiciary publicly, claiming it was corrupt, and mobilized supporters to demand the resignation of members of the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court. There were also frequent confrontations with the traditional media who were linked to the elite

landowning families of the *media luna*, with Morales describing them as a principal enemy of the post-neoliberal project.

Such illiberal behaviour retained popular support, as it was considered part of the struggle against a pro-neoliberal opposition bloc intent on restraining the MAS's attempts to adhere to electoral promises to move toward a post-neoliberal model of democracy that deepened and extended the quality of citizenship for long-excluded groups. Facing a common enemy, an ally-type, party-base relationship developed. Indeed, during this first stage of the post-neoliberal process, via the Unity Pact,[2] CONALCAM,[3] the Constituent Assembly process, the promulgation of a new Constitution and the appointment of movement/organization leaders to ministry positions, the quality of democracy for popular sectors who had been excluded in the preceding market democracy era was deepened and extended.

In January 2009 voters approved a new Constitution by 61.4 per cent to 38.6 per cent. The Constitution outlines various mechanisms that seek to deepen and extend democracy. Adhering to Unity Pact demands, the Constitution redefined the nation as "plurinational and communitarian". Bolivia's democracy is described in article 1.1 as "participatory, representative and communitarian". In addition to standard liberal representative democracy, mechanisms of direct and participatory democracy include referendum, recall of public servants, prior consultation and legislative initiatives of citizens. Furthermore, members of the judiciary, after pre-selection by the legislative, are to be elected by the populace. Organized civil society is to participate in the design of public politics, and to execute social control at all levels of the state. In terms of extending democracy, the 2009 Constitution supports economic, social, and cultural rights for underprivileged groups, proclaiming its primary goal as to achieve *buen vivir*. To achieve this, the Constitution calls for the distribution of the surplus from non-renewable resource extraction to all citizens.

Despite the forging of ally-type relations between MAS and popular organizations, the 2009–14 period would witness the emergence of party-base tensions. To understand why, it is necessary to outline the nature of government–TNC relations post-2010 and how these shaped state autonomy.

2. The Unity Pact was a coalition of popular movements, who came together in order to fight first for the realization of the Constituent Assembly and, after that process had begun, to articulate and promote campesino and indigenous interests in the assembly (Zuazo 2010: 129).
3. In response to opposition bloc destabilizing tactics, and stemming from the Unity Pact, Morales organized supporters from the top down into the Coordinadora Nacional por el Cambio (CONALCAM).

TENSIONS IN THE POST-NEOLIBERAL PROCESS (2009–14)

Before Morales's re-election in 2009, "Bolivian politics was characterized by sharp polarization between the opposition on the right and the government and its allies on the left" (Ellner 2013: 17). However, with the promulgation of the new constitution and the retreat of the erstwhile secessionists into institutional channels of opposition, the MAS was no longer able to rally the base against a common enemy (Fontana 2013). In fact, after the secessionist drive was defeated, tensions escalated between party and base.

To fulfil the promises to boost social citizenship, Morales depended on revenues from the country's natural-resource industries. However, he had inherited an extractive industry with path-dependencies that imbued TNCs with high levels of structural power (Kaup 2010). The state gas company, YPFB, and the hydrocarbon sector in general, had received very little investment since the late 1990s. Furthermore, the gas industry was dominated by Petrobras and Repsol, which had long-term contracts giving them access to hydrocarbon reserves that bi- and multilateral trade agreements legally guaranteed (Kaup 2013).

Morales was elected promising to eliminate the worst excesses of economic exclusion, but this was not an easily fulfilled promise. The Bolivian economy was underdeveloped and reliant on commodity exports; the state extraction company was underfunded and outdated; and transnational extractive firms were contractually and infrastructurally embedded in the economy and had the extractive capacity and capital to invest in new explorations. In this context, Morales could not push for wholesale nationalization (Kaup 2010: 135). However, taxes and royalties on transnational corporations were increased, boosting state income from gas exports, from US$673 million in 2005, to more than US$5 billion in 2013. YPFB increased its role, both operationally and as an auditor, while it had a greater voice in determining the destination of investments (Paz & Ramírez-Cendero 2021: 138, 144). Despite these advances, the state sought only to regain control of previously capitalized assets, and the firms holding these assets extracted a small percentage of Bolivia's gas (Kaup 2010). Hence, most of the hydrocarbon value chain was not nationalized.

Public expenditure, underpinned by a commodities boom and the increased taxes and royalties on hydrocarbon exports, increased by 500 per cent between 2006 and 2013 (Arteaga 2015). There were significant investments in education and health. Transfers such as the Bono Juancito Pinto, which aimed at incentivizing school attendance, covered 1.8 million children; all of the population were eligible for Renta Dignidad, an old-age pension**;** and the Bono Juana Azurduy aimed to lower maternal-infant mortality rates and chronic child malnutrition**.** From 1999 to 2011, average income rose 45 per cent, and 182 per cent among rural populations (*ibid.*)

The real minimum wage increased by 87.7 per cent from 2005–14 (Johnson & Lefebvre 2014). Inequality decreased, with the income of poorer sectors of the population growing much faster since 2006 than that of the higher-income households. Poverty was reduced between 2005 and 2011 from 59.6 per cent to 45 per cent, and extreme poverty fell from 36.7 per cent to 20.9 per cent (*ibid.*).

There was a clear movement toward a post-neoliberal model of development and democracy, and Morales and the MAS presented their project as a radical alternative to neoliberalism, involving a diversification of the economy away from primary export-based development, accompanied by a nationalization of Bolivia's natural resources. However, neither of these goals was fully achieved. Bolivia became more dependent on primary exports than before, with primary goods increasing from 89 per cent of total export value in 2005 to 95 per cent in 2012 (ECLAC 2013: 111). Hydrocarbons, as a share of total export value, increased from 35 per cent before Morales's first election to 51 per cent in the 2011–14 period (Arze 2016). Furthermore, Petrobras and Repsol, two transnational companies, retained control over 75 per cent of natural gas production. Such compromise, while allowing Morales to govern, restricted the space for a more radical agenda. Despite popular sector support for a radical-substantive democratization project, the moderation of the project, in the face of the structural power of economic opposition, triggered a recalibration of party–base relations.

Leaders from those organizations that were part of the original core of the MAS tended to gain access to ministries more than non-core organizations who strategically supported and allied with the MAS. Core organizations' choices for MAS candidates to fill representative roles in the legislature were accepted more often, and their voices carried more weight in participatory spaces, such as CONALCAM. For strategic organizations, however, the post-neoliberal project contained regressive elements of top-down meddling. Those organizations who sought to challenge the MAS's development plan – either because it was considered too moderate and ceded too much ground to domestic and transnational economic elites, or because it relied on a continual encroachment into indigenous lands – faced an increasingly hostile environment. The MAS leadership sought to weaken contestatory organizations via a divide-and-conquer strategy. By incorporating militant leaders into the party structure, MAS leaders sought to ensure a calm governing environment. Co-opted organization leaders were required to show political loyalty if they wished to receive a cut of the public funds, which they required in order to respond to the demands of their base (Tapia 2011; Lazar 2008).

In conjunction with co-opting, the MAS fostered *paralelismo*, that is, the creating of parallel organizations to existing contestatory organizations. Factions of popular organization leaderships who would support the MAS

and refrain from contestatory mobilization against MAS policies were identified and funded, while critical voices were side-lined. If confrontations emerged with core-allies, the government framed these as "creative tensions" but, where strategic groups' mobilizations directly challenged the underpinning development model and government–business relations, they were labelled "counterrevolutionary" (Trujillo & Spronk 2018). The outcome was a divided and confused base, whose collective power was diminished, while social movements, indigenous communities and former allies turned against each other. These processes of co-optation, division and *paralelismo* were also evidenced, among others – the CONAMAQ, CIDOB, urban popular organizations such as the FEJUVEs, and the Assembly of Guaraní People (APG) (Brown 2020a; Schilling-Vacaflor 2017; Morales 2013).

RE-ELECTION REFERENDUM, CONTESTED ELECTIONS, COUP AND A NEW MAS-LED ERA (2014–21)

In the 2014 presidential elections Morales won 61 per cent of the vote. At the inauguration of his third term, he outlined a ten-year development plan – the Patriotic Agenda 2025. The Agenda outlined plans to continue using extraction to finance development. As vice-president García-Linera stated in August 2016, "we are going to use extractivism for at least two decades more" in order to develop and protect society. Moreover, with "no other strong national leadership in the wings, MAS party logic held that a fourth presidential term for Morales was critical to accomplish this mission" (Achtenberg 2016: 374–5). Thus, Morales sought a referendum on modifying the Constitution to allow a third re-election. A "No" coalition formed around traditional right-wing politicians. In addition, "ex-MASistas" and representatives of alienated left-popular sectors, seeking to rehabilitate what they perceived as a stagnating "process of change", constituted themselves as the "popular No" bloc, and rejected the referendum process (*ibid.*).

The referendum was narrowly defeated by 51.3 per cent, thereby blocking the possibility of re-election for Morales. However, the MAS asked the Constitutional Tribunal to rescind limits on elected authorities seeking re-election, arguing that they violate human rights. The Constitutional Tribunal ruled that all elected officials could run for office indefinitely. The illiberal use of presidential power to meddle in judicial affairs, alongside the court's decision to allow re-election, galvanized the divided political opposition, while further de-legitimizing Morales in the eyes of some former allies.

The referendum defeat reignited the dispute over the meaning of democracy, with opposition protests focusing on the defence of liberal norms, such as alternation of leaders, pluralism, and the rule of law. As Mayorga (2020: 6)

states, the MAS responded to such critiques of its democratic credentials by focusing on the participative and substantive components of democracy, highlighting that there is an equivalence between democracy and justice.

Following the "no" vote in the 2016 referendum, and the judicial decision to allow Morales to run, in the lead up to the 2019 elections the opposition bloc pushed the narrative that an authoritarian, illiberal MAS would do anything to stay in power. According to early polling, Morales's main rival was former president Carlos Mesa. To avoid a second-round run-off required winning a simple majority or more than 40 per cent of the vote plus a 10 per cent margin of victory over the nearest rival. With almost 84 per cent of the votes counted, and with Morales leading with 45.3 per cent to Mesa's 38.2 per cent, the unofficial online counting system (*trep*) stopped live transmission of the quick-count ballots. The following day, following a request from the Organization of American States (OAS) for a resumption of the *trep*, updated results were presented, reflecting 95 per cent of tally sheets. Morales' margin of victory had narrowly exceeded the 10 per cent required to avoid a second-round run-off. The OAS immediately stated their "deep concern" about the "change in trend", creating the impression that fraud had taken place. However, a report by researchers at MIT's Election Data and Science Lab suggests that:

> Morales's victory can be explained by his voter support before the preliminary vote count halted … We find the final result can be explained by a pattern in the vote count prior to the cut-off of the *trep*. Therefore, we cannot find quantitative evidence of an irregular trend as claimed by the OAS.
>
> (Williams & Curiel 2020: n.p.)

Following the Electoral Court's announcement of the results in favour of Morales, with the OAS casting doubts over their legitimacy and with opposition-bloc media stoking beliefs that fraud had occurred, large-scale protests erupted in urban areas. While the initial protesters were middle-class voters angered by perceived fraud, there was a belief among diverse social classes that the government would use power illiberally to remain in power. Formerly allied groups, who had faced co-optive efforts, rejected the electoral results. These included: lowland indigenous groups; coca growers in the Yungas who felt Morales favoured core-organization cocaleros in the Chapare; cooperative miners in Potosí; CONAMAQ; and factory-worker unions in Cochabamba. They later demanded Morales's renunciation (Schneider 2019).

While middle-class and some former strategically allied popular organizations protested, the moment was ultimately captured by far-right

conservative elements of the opposition bloc. Since April 2019, Luis Camacho had taken control of the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz and had vehemently opposed Morales's re-election bid. Camacho reached out to the president of the Civic Committee of the Potosi region (Comico) headed by Marco Pumari. Representing urban civil society interests in the city, Comico had been mobilizing against the Morales government since 2016, demanding that the central state give the department a greater share of revenues earned from extracting lithium in the region. The powerful Potosí miners openly rejected Morales. This was crucial because the miners had a strong voice in the powerful COB. Juan Carlos Huarachi, head of the COB, called on Morales to "reflect" on his position. The COB's withdrawal of support greatly weakened Morales's position.

With Camacho and allied racist figures inciting violence, and with protests continuing across the country, Camacho called on the police to "stand on the side of the people". Police mutinies followed in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz and Sucre while the police mingled with protesters in La Paz. General Williams Kaliman "suggested" Morales step aside. With a loss of military power; with ideological powers in the form of church leaderships, the OAS, and traditional and social media aligned against him; with business associations withdrawing their support; with a re-emerging political opposition; and with a popular base that was divided and unwilling to engage in mass-defensive mobilization, Morales and MAS representatives were forced from office.

Following the ousting of Morales, Jeanine Áñez, former deputy leader of the senate (also former TV host and long-time critic of Morales from the *media luna*), with a Bible in her hands, was declared caretaker president. When Áñez was named interim president, she immediately received the backing of major business organizations who stated their support for the "return to democracy" (Wolff 2020). The interim government's constitutional role was to convene new elections. However, instead, it recognized right-wing leader Juan Guaidó as legitimate president of Venezuela; persecuted MAS leaders and intimidated supporters; arbitrarily detained outspoken critics of the coup government; shut down critical media outlets and arrested journalists; called members of the MAS "animals"; and deployed the armed forces to repress indigenous anti-coup protesters at Sacaba and Senkata, killing at least 22 and injuring several hundred (IHRC & University Network for Human Rights 2019; Achtenberg 2020).

With the interim government postponing elections, indigenous and campesino groups in the Unity Pact began organizing their bases, first to demand new elections, and then to vote for the MAS presidential and vice-presidential ticket of Luis Arce and David Choquehuanca. The COB, whose leader Juan Carlos Huarachi had suggested Morales step aside to pacify the country, apologized for failing to defend the president and gave the interim government an ultimatum: fresh elections or "social upheaval". While there

had been tensions between the MAS and sectors of its constituent base around 2018–19, as well as tensions *within* popular organizations, the extreme actions of the interim government provided a common enemy which acted as a spur to reunify divided organizations.

When the elections were finally held in October 2020, the MAS ticket of Arce and Choquehuanca won more than 55 per cent of the vote, with Carlos Mesa winning 28.5 per cent and Fernando Camacho just 14 per cent. In the first elections without Morales, and without state powers which critics had long-accused the MAS of abusing to help guarantee success, the party easily defeated the opposition candidates. Moreover, the MAS candidates won more of the vote share nationally than Morales had achieved in the 2019 elections, while winning in six of nine departments. The MAS also won a majority in both chambers of the legislature, although not a two-thirds majority as they had achieved in the 2014 elections. The results dispelled any notions that the MAS was simply a party whose success depended on Morales. Indeed, it appears that, while Morales's candidacy may have been unacceptable for some voters, the MAS, and the post-neoliberal model it advocated, retained legitimacy. It is important to stress, however, that part of the 2020 success for the MAS was based on its status as the only party capable of competing on a national level and defeating the pro-neoliberal, racist opposition parties. Tensions between the MAS and constituent organizations that had been simmering under Morales's presidencies, while pushed aside to confront a common enemy, had not disappeared. For example, local elections in March 2021 witnessed further tensions between the MAS and new popular parties that received the backing of former strategically allied organizations. The new parties, and their bases, demanded that the MAS end efforts at controlling popular contestatory mobilization, via co-optive practices and support for parallel organizations.

POPULISM AND DEMOCRACY: LESSONS FROM BOLIVIA

The emergence of outsider populist Evo Morales at the head of the MAS was a direct response to a crisis of representation for popular sectors. An exclusionary market model of democracy organized the interests of white elites into politics, while indigenous-popular voices were excluded from policymaking. Rising socioeconomic exclusion triggered a Polanyian defensive movement by society. A myriad of groups such as cocaleros, urban labour, lowland indigenous groups and women's groups, among others, faced dual political and socioeconomic exclusion, under the neoliberal-infused market model of democracy. Although each group had specific grievances, Morales successfully framed their issues under a common banner of anti-neoliberalism

and called on organizations to unite in social and electoral protest against market democracy. Morales' populist framing mechanism, and dual street/electoral protest tactics, thus directly challenged the status quo and called for a reconstruction of the social order, whereby the state would act as a guarantor of societal well-being (with society now broadened to incorporate popular sectors rather than just a white elite). Two distinct social blocs thus emerged – a popular bloc which backed Morales's project and an elite-led bloc, with ties to US capital who had benefitted under the neoliberal era.

Populism, understood as a defensive movement that challenges an exclusionary, delegitimized status quo, will foster opposition. As the Bolivian process highlights, democratization processes will inherently entail tensions and pushback from those who have long enjoyed dominant status. As these struggles advance, it is highly likely there will be episodes of (simultaneous) democratization and de-democratization: liberal norms may be bent so as to bypass opposition to a project founded on promises to deepen participation and extend substantive citizenship rights to formerly excluded sectors. In fact, there is "ample reason to believe that elected executives seeking to broaden substantive democratic inclusion might clash with elites who prize democracy's constraints on absolute power more than its promise to empower the many" (Slater 2013: 732–3). Indeed, as Cameron (2021: 786) notes,

> without denying populism's potentially deleterious effects on democracy, the focus is partially misplaced because oligarchic modes of rule and populist mobilization are co-constitutive … Populism is both a typical reaction to oligarchic modes of rule and an endemic feature of democratic politics in unequal societies.

Understanding these power struggles, between anti-neoliberal populists elected to respond to oligarchic domination of democracy and the elites who seek to defend their domination of the political system, requires that theorists move beyond a narrow institutionalist appraisal of populist-led projects. The sole focus of analysis should not only be on the "illiberal populist" or "competitive authoritarian", but on how anti-neoliberal outsiders interact with oligarchic opposition. As the Bolivian case demonstrates, to grasp the actions of newly elected anti-neoliberal governments, including willingness to engage in illiberal behaviours, and to comprehend popular sector support or rejection for government actions, it is essential to view the post-neoliberal process via a historic lens, that encapsulates the market democracy era. By grasping who was incorporated, and who was excluded under market democracy (political and socioeconomic inclusion of middle classes and elites, exclusion of popular and indigenous sectors), and taking account of the preceding

domination of ideological, economic, military and political sources of power by a select elite bloc, we can better comprehend why governments may bend liberal norms, and why they retain popular backing for doing so. That is "measuring" the impact of populist outsider-led projects on democratic quality can only be meaningful, if we analyse the preceding status quo that triggered the populist response in the first place.

In addition to highlighting potential tensions between liberal and radical-substantive democracy, the Bolivian case demonstrates how populist projects that unify multiple groups under a common framing mechanism (for example anti-neoliberal democracy) may lead to internal tensions in the popular bloc, or the *pueblo*. While a broad frame is essential to garner the electoral (and street) backing of multiple groups (especially where the populist is an outsider candidate lacking an institutionalized party structure), over time specific group grievances may become a source of party–base tension. Moreover, as the populist project, challenging the status quo, must work within confines set by the very elites whose interests are challenged, it is inevitable that a populist project will fail to adhere to all pre-electoral promises to all groups. For example, as the Morales-led project confronted the confines set by a path-dependent reliance on primary commodity exportation, the MAS clashed with sectors of the popular bloc, leading to issues of co-optation and *paralelismo*. Hence, a full grasp of the impacts of populist-led processes on democratic quality entails broadening our conceptualization of democracy, from a narrow liberal perspective to one that incorporates liberal, participative and substantive criteria. Second, it is necessary to evaluate the nature and evolution of party–base relations.

Finally, while populist projects may be passing fads; brief moments of rage that are soon dispersed when the populist outsider fails to achieve promises once in office, this is not necessarily the case. The post-neoliberal project in Bolivia demonstrated that a more substantive model of democracy and citizenship could be achieved if a populist outsider won election. Despite all the frictions, and the moderation of the project in the face of opposition bloc powers, the post-neoliberal model of democracy, outlined in the Constitution, retains high levels of legitimacy. Spaces of participation, such as the Unity Pact that brought together the leaders of major popular organizations to guide the MAS from below, were reforged during the 2019–20 period of confrontation with the coup government, and the MAS candidate easily won presidential elections on a mandate to deepen and advance the post-neoliberal project. There is a highly politicized and powerful organized popular bloc who have seen both the possibilities and dangers of a progressive populist in office. Bolivia's populist moment has thus altered the status quo irrevocably and a wholesale return to exclusionary market democracy is now off the table.

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