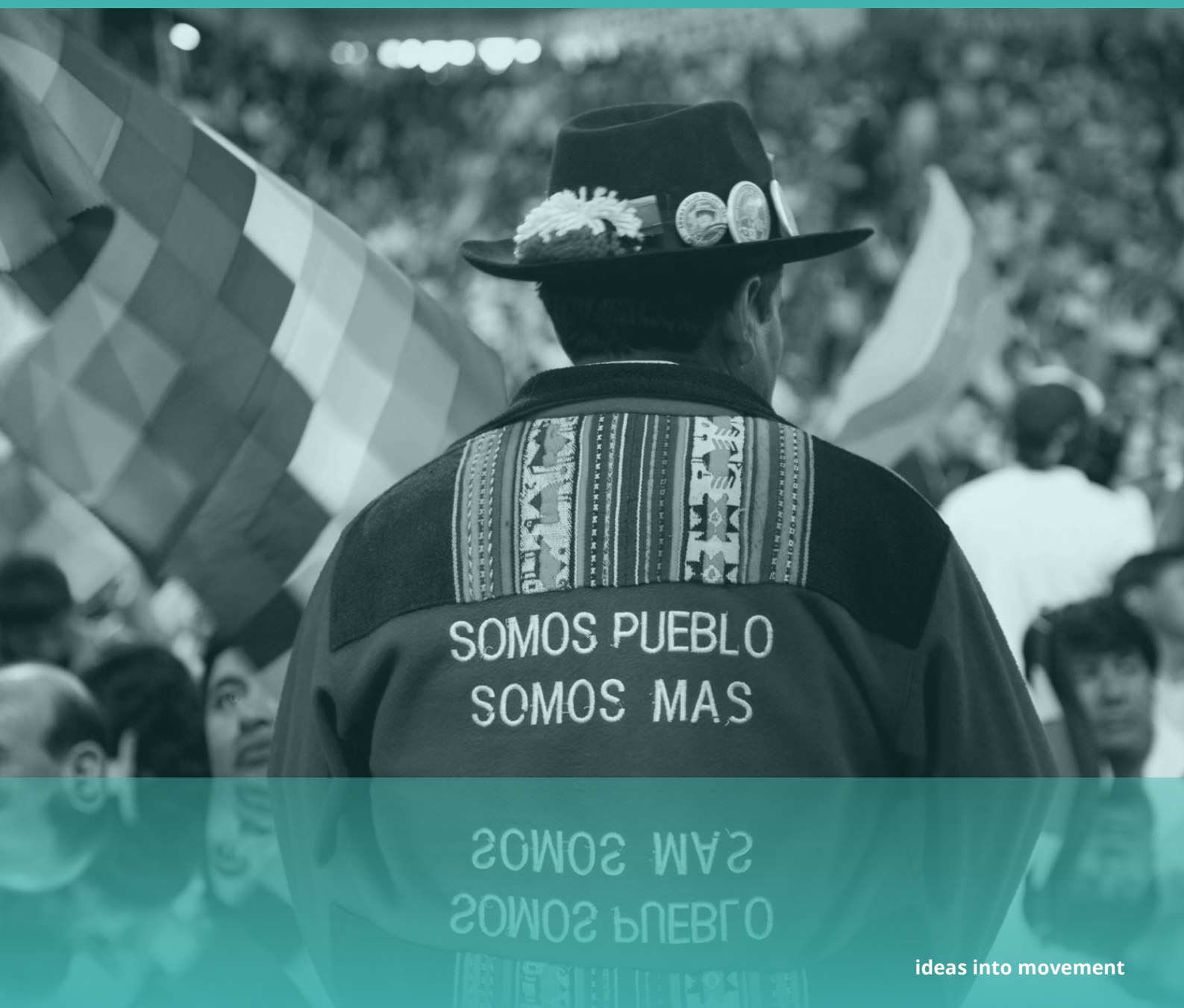


The Left in Power

State officials' perspectives on the challenges to progressive governance in Bolivia

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The context

When the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement towards Socialism- MAS) led by coca grower leader Evo Morales won elections in Bolivia late in 2005 on a social and economic justice platform, its rapid rise to power was propelled by social movements that ranked among the world's most radical.¹ One of the 'pink tide' governments that have held office in Latin America during the last 15 years, Bolivia's new government inherited an impoverished country, the most indigenous in South America, with what the UN Development Program calls a 'state with holes'² as well as little infrastructure, where 500 years of relentless resource extraction from silver to soy has bequeathed a legacy of severe environmental degradation. A primary commodity exporter with a small internal market, Bolivia holds a peripheral position in the global political economy, with deep, but highly unequal integration into the international economic system.

The state apparatus the MAS took over was, as Centeno et al. (2017:14) describe for much of the Global South, an "incomplete, distorted and malformed" system brought from Spain via colonialism, and then over time re-shaped by local elites. Bolivia has, and in many ways continues to have, what Echebarría and Cortázar (2007) call a clientilistic bureaucracy which entails a high degree of politicization in processes of hiring, firing and promotion. Ten per cent of the country's workforce was in the public sector in 2005, and public jobs have always paid better than those in the private sector (PNUD, 2007: 262-3). The state has a low performance capability and little autonomy from political parties, giving parties an undue influence in determining state capacity. The new government stemmed from a party that was poorly consolidated and in the process of becoming more clientelist and hierarchical when it assumed office.

But in Bolivia's case, it was not just the party that influenced state capacity, as the MAS had been established by social movements to represent their demands. This led to many top government appointments being drawn from social movement leaders, giving their organizations' internal structures an enormous influence on state operations, particularly in the first MAS government. Many of these social movements tended to be top-down and male-dominated, as well as heavily shaped by patronage relationships (see Zegada and Komandina, 2017).

State performance is intimately shaped by the demands placed upon it. In Bolivia, social movements had high expectations of what they considered "their" government, which the new administration felt bound to respond to. At the same time, in 2008, the MAS government faced an elite-led

¹ Centuries of marginalizing most of the country's population from the political process created a culture where conflicts have frequently been resolved by protests and blockades, followed by negotiation (Young, 2017).

² This refers to the state's limited physical presence throughout Bolivia's territory and the government's incomplete bureaucratic and legal capacity (PNUD, 2007).

uprising in the east that at some points threatened to split the country apart.

All of this makes what the MAS has achieved through what it calls 'the process of change' even more remarkable, in line with what Seekings (2017) describes about the "surprising story" in the expansion of welfare states across the Global South even in the face of widespread rent-seeking (a less pejorative term than 'corruption'). The Morales government has substantially increased state invention in the economy, almost immediately semi-nationalizing natural gas production, and increasing royalties and taxes paid by transnational companies. This substantially enlarged government revenue, allowing for an unprecedented expansion in services and infrastructure, particularly in long-abandoned rural areas.

Twelve and a half years on, the middle class has grown by a million people (10 per cent of the population) and both the government and the economy have tripled in size (*Financial Times*, 2015). Largely thanks to social welfare payments, government investment and a multiplying of the minimum wage, extreme poverty has dropped by half and income inequality has fallen significantly. Bolivia has one of South America's fastest growing economies (World Bank, 2017), and holds substantial financial reserves per capita, although these have dropped significantly since the global decline in commodity prices after 2013. Its natural resources serve its population more than any other time in its history, more land is controlled by peasant farmers, and indigenous and women's rights have expanded. By any gauge, and certainly compared to its predecessors, what the MAS government has achieved is extraordinary, both in terms of emphasis on services for the poorest and the sheer volume of public investment particularly in road infrastructure, hospitals, health clinics, public housing and schools.

However, the country's underlying economic structure remains largely untouched. "We have the best economy the country has ever had, but it is on a totally capitalist path," said a former government minister interviewed for this report. While a new class of often indigenous truckers, merchants, contraband traders and small mine owners have become wealthy, and the traditional elites have mostly lost direct political power, their economic clout is largely unchanged. While a left-wing government has increased regulation (Naqvi, 2018), banks and construction companies have benefited from the growing economy and agro-industrial elites in the eastern economic powerhouse of Santa Cruz have grown even wealthier. The government has largely failed in one of its central goals: to diversify a dependent economy through industrialization schemes. These include an Amazon sugar factory that lacks sufficient cane to operate at capacity and a recently built fertilizer plant constructed before markets and transportation infrastructure were secured (*Los Tiempos*, 2017).

Unionization rates have dropped since Morales took power, undermining the once-powerful *Central Obrera Boliviana* (Bolivian Workers Central, or

COB). The informal sector continues to be a powerful force in the economy, encompassing 75 per cent of urban labour (OIT, 2016:2). Many Bolivians work in small family businesses, often in temporary jobs with few benefits and below the 20-worker threshold for union formation.

Expanded resource extraction is the preferred means for funding increased infrastructure and services, which has created overlapping interests between the government and Bolivia's traditional elites. The push of exploration, new roads and extractive projects deeper into the country's remote areas gives Bolivia the highest current rate of deforestation in the region, with the costs borne most heavily by local indigenous populations (Farthing, 2017).

By 2017, the MAS government's original discourse of societal transformation had given way to trumpeting the newfound economic stability it had delivered. In the process, its political agenda has become more centrist, shifting from its early commitment to communitarian socialism towards capitalist-orientated growth-promoting policies (Achtenberg, 2016) Mendoza-Botelho (2018) characterizes the government as a 'neo-patrimonial state' which has changed the rules of who participates but not the underlying model.

The government has both extended and constricted democratic rights and concentrated power (Wolff, 2017). Institutional controls and oversight tend to have deteriorated, while political participation, integration and substantive equality have improved. Constitutionally-mandated, if limited, indigenous participation in the Legislative Assembly, legislative parity for women, mandated but uneven use of prior consultation, increased indigenous representation at the sub-national level, and indigenous autonomy are all now part of the political landscape.³ While the 2009 Constitution extends rights – now half the national legislature is female, for example, and indigenous and working-class participation in departmental and national legislatures has mushroomed – these have frequently succumbed to MAS party control directed from the executive branch.

The role of bureaucrats in government-driven social change

The emphasis of this report is on the role played by Bolivian leftwing state officials and the challenges they faced in advancing a social and economic justice agenda, such as the one central to the MAS government discourse. Social movements need to grapple with not only building successful political parties and winning power but also with using that power strategically to best implement change. Government employees play a unique role in this process, and face the challenge of remaining true to their political ideology while ensuring the execution of a professional and fair public bureaucracy.

³ 140 of Bolivia's current 337 municipalities contain more than 90 per cent indigenous peoples.

The report does not consider in any detail policy analysis and the policy-making process in the legislative, judicial or executive branches, or the political alliances, negotiations and compromises necessary to secure and maintain a progressive government in office. The relationships with beneficiaries/end users of government services, as well as the development of participatory governance (meaning initiatives that deepen active citizen participation in the governmental process), are only contemplated in as much as they impact bureaucrats' capacity.

Despite the external constraints they face, progressive bureaucrats play a critical role in implementing more equitable policies under leftwing governments. Their perspectives on the challenges to effective policy design and implementation extend beyond the confines of their specific jobs to incorporate a broader critique of how social change is implemented (or not) through government initiatives. Their contribution to understanding the policy implementation process in low-income societies is at the heart of this report.

The study focused on open-ended questions that provided the 14 interviewees ample opportunity to enumerate the issues that were of highest priority to them. All of the respondents, the vast majority of whom were middle or upper middle class, were people who self-identified as leftwing, some with party affiliation, some without; some still supporting the MAS, some highly critical and others actively opposed. A few of the respondents chose to remain anonymous. They came from across the government and originated from various regions of the country. Of the 14, three were women and three indigenous-identified, which as most were ministers or vice-ministers, loosely reflects the average government ministerial composition.

Three core questions were posed to all the interviewees. The interviews lasted on average between 45 minutes to an hour. The questions were:

- What obstacles did people committed to the “process of change” as the MAS call their program face in the implementation of innovative programs?
- What conditions/resources could have enabled them to execute their jobs/programs better?
- What was their relationship with social movements, grassroots communities or participatory governance initiatives in the formulation and execution of policy?
- What advice do they have for others working in progressive bureaucracies?⁴

The responses are explored below as a way of identifying some challenges left governance faces and point to the need for far more in-depth research

⁴ The interviews were complemented by a 2015 memoir by former Minister of Justice Casimira Rodríguez that is in part about her time in government (Rodríguez Romero, 2015).

that focuses on the process, rather than product, in understanding how to promote progressive social change.’

A tension that emerges throughout the interviews is the need for progressive bureaucrats to be simultaneously embedded in the sector they are governing so that they adequately grasp its needs and capacities, but also autonomous so that they are not entrapped by obligations to sectoral or political party interests. This entrapment is often called ‘bureaucratic capture’ in the academic literature (Evans, 1995). When these embedded relationships are successful, they facilitate effective policy implementation. Bureaucrats’ efficacy is further positively impacted by their job longevity, which allows them to gain valuable experience-based knowledge and to develop extensive networks in their fields (Olavarría Gambi, 2007).

There is an inevitable tension between technocrats and those who come into public administration after an election with a commitment to a radical political project. Javier Arevilca argues that “we desperately need a more institutionalized bureaucracy, but we need this to be balanced with people who have a real commitment to the political project we are working to achieve.”

Alberto Borda recounts that as the planning process stumbled, “the ideologues and intellectuals in the Planning Ministry left in frustration, and slowly professionals and technocrats were incorporated who lacked political clarity and commitment.” Claudia Peña remembers that “technicians became a problem for us because often they didn’t understand the ideological/political focus of our proposals and could hold them up, largely because they were ignorant of the issues. Most of them came from previous governments. They just weren’t prepared to accept the radical changes we proposed in rural areas – many of them had never even been to a rural community in their lives.”

Casimira Rodríguez Romero (2015: 341) recalls how technical staff in the Ministry of Justice made proposals that differed little from the highly dysfunctional justice system already in place. “It was completely traditional. This was a warning to me that it would be an uphill battle to institute change. In our country, most policies just repeat or are copied. Even the lawyers were afraid to introduce more radical ideas.”

The legacy of neo-liberalism and neo-colonialism

Twenty years of neoliberal policies prior to 2005 left an indelible imprint on Bolivia. These included an increased emphasis on individualism in a rapidly urbanizing society whose historical roots lay largely in indigenous communitarian values; a shrinking of an already limited state apparatus; a push towards privatization of government-run enterprises, and in a highly centralized state, a drive towards poorly-funded government decentralization with a community accountability component called popular participation (Kohl and Farthing, 2006).

“We have not managed to separate ourselves from the great inheritance that neoliberalism left us,” contends former Vice Minister of Planning Alberto Borda. “We had no real planning in government, and a system of ‘popular participation’ through which people imposed their demands. I don’t blame them – someone has to make decisions, and in the absence of planning, it was the social organizations. But it created a chaotic situation.”

This bureaucratic legacy extended further back than the neoliberal period as the Bolivian state has always reproduced inequality (PNUD, 2007). Freddy Condo, former Vice-Minister of Lands, explained. “At the beginning, there was a lot of euphoria that we would change everything. But there were groups inside the Ministries affiliated with former political parties who had more knowledge about government operations than anyone else. In many cases, they had jobs that were passed from father to son to grandson. These family apparatuses were very difficult to dismantle and in many ways were a necessary evil. Perhaps it would have been a good idea to throw all the people out – but how could we have managed all the local and international contracts and agreements already made? Our hands were tied.”

Tom Kruse, who worked in the Foreign Ministry, noted this family control as well: “In the diplomatic core, four or five surnames dominated, curtailing our ability to dismantle the neoliberal state.” “In reality, we were a series of popular organizations that were taking over a colonial state. We had no choice but to rely on professionals – not always from the left,” said a former minister who chose to remain anonymous. “This compromised our political project right from the beginning.”

These vestiges from the past were compounded by the inexperience of those in the new government, a problem highlighted by many of the interviewees. Tom Kruse noted “the scarcity of people with Masters in Public Administration or its equivalent on our side.” David Aruquipa, former head of cultural patrimony in the Ministry of Culture said: “When we finally won the election, it was the result of many years of organizing, of being part of movements that had been marginalized for a very long time. When we came into office, we were mostly activists, and very few of us really had any idea about public administration and its challenges.”

Planning capacity

Comprehensive planning is at the heart of public administration. In 2007, the government instituted a National Development Plan (NPD), built on three pillars: macroeconomic and financial stability, stable employment growth and social inclusion (Mendonça Cunha and Gonçalves, 2010). In 2013, it adopted the “Patriotic Agenda 2025” based on 13 pillars that ranged from the eradication of extreme poverty, to promoting scientific, technological and financial sovereignty, to state-led diversification of the economy, protection of the natural environment and cultural diversity. At the sub-national level, planning is almost non-existent.

Alberto Borda elaborated on implementing the national plan. “The strength of any government is in its ability to administer the state,” he said. “Instituting planning was the biggest challenge we faced, really an enormous one. The focus was on executing public works, which led to an emphasis on infrastructure above all else which meant we ended up with a lot of isolated projects.” An anonymous interviewee who worked in the Vice-Presidency added: “We were unable to plan beyond a year which meant we had no idea if things we started could be finished.” Jose Luis Perreira worked with various Ministries with an emphasis on agricultural credit. “Nowhere in the government is there a clear overarching vision of the agriculture sector, what it could be and what direction government planning should take,” he contends. “There were very few people within the government who had any sort of strategic vision.”

Walter Delgadillo, who served as Minister of Labour and then of Public Works, pointed out that the lack of planning was aggravated by a failure to evaluate projects. “This meant we couldn’t engage in discussions about what we had achieved. Rather we were trapped in addressing immediate concerns. We just didn’t use resources well on many occasions.” “Without a plan, we had nothing to measure the success or failure of projects against”, added Alberto Borda.

Former Ministry of Planning consultant Juan Tellez reported on a meeting with the Ministry of Water and the Environment in which he “discovered they have absolutely no idea, even given all the investment they have made, of how their projects have impacted agricultural production.” Tellez continued, “Although good things that have been achieved through the *Evo Cumple*⁵ program, decisions about projects are made that have nothing to do with a plan. The result can be anarchic and very frustrating.”

Dependence on foreign funding

Like many countries in the Global south, Bolivia has a long history of its public administration being funded by foreign institutions, notably by international financial institutions such as the World Bank (Kohl and Farthing, 2009). This carried over into the new administration. Alberto Borda reports that, “Only three people in our Vice-Ministry were financed by the national Treasury with 25 people funded by the World Bank.” Alejandro Almaraz, former Vice-Minister of Lands explained: “With only a few staff financed by the state, how can you carry out a land reform? It made me wonder how truly committed people leading the government were to what had always been one of our principal goals.” Freddy Condo reports that foreign funders often tried to impose their agendas on the Ministries as they had in the past. “The international organizations had to learn how to adjust to us because our approach was so different,” he

⁵ This was a one-off set of projects that began in 2007 under the direction of the Presidency. It was not incorporated into the National Development Plan.

explained. “The fact that they were obligated to spend the funds at their disposal gave us quite a bit of leverage in redirecting the agenda.”

Ideological direction and education

The MAS government has frequently displayed a highly pragmatic, rather than ideological, approach to politics, especially after their 2009 electoral win. This has boosted the allotment of party positions and government appointments from different sectors of the MAS and representing Bolivia’s geographical regions in order to solidify party unity. These ‘*pegas*’, as they are known, quickly became central to negotiations between different party factions (Do Alto and Stefanoni, 2010). David Aruquipa explains that “of course, there was always the idea that it was party members’ turn to benefit from the spoils of government. That became the focus for a lot of people, to the detriment of the original transformative agenda.” Walter Degadillo, however, reports that efforts were made to address this tendency. “We managed to set up a training school for future government functionaries, then worked with social movements to draw up a professional profile and drew from people in the training program. This made the hiring process less arbitrary and subject to external pressure.”

The conflict and resentments inherent in the distribution of limited political and administrative posts served to further dilute the MAS’s ideological orientation. Alberto Borda recounts that the focus on one-off public works “was adopted by people in the government who didn’t have any concept of the importance of ideological and philosophical principles. It was easier to do this rather than confront the most complex issues. We didn’t give enough attention to developing an ethics, a set of values and an understanding of the principal contradictions Bolivia faces. Without developing a committed militancy, the possibilities for instituting change drop.” A former minister regrets that “while our middle class who come from the working class has grown, this has not been accompanied by ideological training, so that these people understand what the process of change actually means.”

This lack of focus on ideological education led to a weakness in articulating the more conceptual aspects of the project. Alberto Borda recalls that “Generally the concept of *Vivir Bien*⁶ was well accepted nationally (and internationally), but the opposition convinced people that it was not clear, not applicable and not measurable. As a result, *Vivir Bien* was never well articulated and became less important over time.” “A revolution is not just material; it’s about consciousness,” said a former minister. “People must be convinced of the process and be part of it. For example, it’s not enough to eliminate poverty, this reduction must be accompanied with ideological education.” Jose Luis Perreira added: “A process of change is about

⁶ *Vivir Bien* (living well), adopted by the Morales government, gauges well-being differently from than indicator such as the UNDP Human Development Index. It seeks harmony, consensus, good governance, the prioritization of community values of self- and mutual respect, redistribution of wealth, and elimination of discrimination while valuing diversity, the natural environment, and privileging community over individual rights (Tellez, 2012).

changing mentalities and the way that we understand ourselves. We need to be raising children who understand the world differently.”

These problems are compounded by the lack of control over the media, which is largely in the hands of the right-wing, as it is throughout Latin America (Weisbrot, 2010). A former minister explains that “with the media dominated by the right, the state has failed to develop a capacity to disseminate its own version of events.” Javier Arevilca draws attention to the problems with social media: “I think a lot of misinformation is getting distributed through the social networks. This is full of lies and serves to disorient the population.”

Bureaucratic autonomy and culture

As Olavarría Gambi (2007) points out, in a presidential system, such as the one found throughout Latin America, most decision-making is concentrated in the executive branch. This, he argues, results in an administrative system where a separation between politicians and administrators is fictitious, as administrators are named by politicians and are dependent on them for their jobs. Therefore, many of the conditions that would facilitate successful policy implementation are not in place and control over them lies beyond the control of bureaucrats.

Government functionaries’ success is further impacted by constraints imposed by existing laws that might be out-of-date or contrary to a progressive agenda. Casimira Rodríguez Romero (2015: 340) described how “we had a huge problem with the laws we inherited, that were written from a neoliberal, privatizing logic, rather than the communitarian, indigenous one we were seeking. We can take radical decisions, but these are applied through a system that has not fundamentally changed since the neoliberal 1990s. And this has blocked radical changes”.

Like bureaucrats around the world, Bolivian government officials struggle with an enormous quantity of paperwork. Alejandro Almaraz recalls that when he was Vice-Minister “the onerous government norms led to unnecessary delays. There was often an obstructive attitude within the bureaucracy – something that should have taken a week took two. Eventually we had to arrange to have exceptions to the rules so that we could function – a kind of autonomy within the Ministry.” An anonymous interviewee within the Supreme Electoral Tribunal added: “Often it is really hard to understand the logic behind these bureaucratic requirements. For example, to rent a room for a training workshop, we have to fill out seven technical specifications. I’m currently trying to purchase equipment and it has taken me two months of filling out forms.” Alejandro Almaraz added: “People ended up swamped by paper and bureaucracy. Then what happens is that people get focused on paperwork and forget the broader issue they are working towards.” However, there was some recognition of this problem within the government, as the anonymous interviewee in the Vice-Presidency reports: “Administrative processes have been somewhat

flexibilized, which has served to reduce or eliminate a certain amount of unnecessary oversight.”

Competition within government units is rife. Claudia Peña, who was Minister of Autonomy, recalls that “sometimes it felt like a war that never ended. You felt that there was always someone who wanted your job, so you had to be watching your back all the time, which took up enormous amount of time and energy that could have been better spent on advancing our work. But the struggle for power – it didn’t matter if they were from the same party or not – was always there.” Casimira Rodríguez Romero (2015: 347) recalled: “I had never before worked in these kinds of conditions, with so many threats and distrust in a context of permanent conflict”.

Job insecurity drives a lot of the competitive attitudes. An anonymous interviewee in the Supreme Electoral Tribunal notes: “In my unit, people change every year. The project I am working on is a long-term one, so we need permanent staff. How can we maintain coherence and continuity in our goals from one year to another?”

Juan Tellez adds: “There was a lot of individualism in people’s attitude towards their jobs. Few ever stayed more than six months until they moved on to something they thought was better. This made it extremely difficult to develop stability and a coherent flow in projects. New staff are on a constant steep learning curve.”

Reflecting much of Bolivian society, hierarchies are rigid and decision-making tends to be top down. “People learn to be ‘yes men’,” says an anonymous interviewee in the Vice-Presidency, “which makes it hard for anyone to suggest new ideas or criticisms.” “People below you would never tell you when they saw something that was out of line or mistaken,” said Tom Kruse. In the Ministry of Culture, David Aruquipa found “the decision about what Vice-Ministries we would have was made by higher up, without any real participation from people involved in working in the cultural field.” Juan Tellez adds: “Ministers are constantly complaining that they haven’t been consulted about a program or change in their ministries.”

Bureaucrats working in the Morales government tend to work very long hours. Claudia Peña complained that “the concept that people should constantly work 14 hours a day is ridiculous. There is this idea that if you work more, you are more committed to the process of change.” Jose Luis Perreira added: “The amount of time you work is not a good indicator of quality and is not sustainable. People need down time, and personal lives, and this government does not support that.”

Historically, within the Bolivian government, whenever a new minister or vice-minister is appointed, s/he brings a new entourage, sometimes to offices swept clean of files and plans, typically grinding government work to a halt. The anonymous interviewee from the Vice-Presidency explained that “people bring in people they can trust; those who are loyal rather

than efficient. I'm anomaly because I don't like managing my friends in the civil service. I've tried not to have a personal relationship with people in my office because I see it as a headache." Casimira Rodríguez added: "many people recommended to me that I form a good team to back me up, as they argue the team is critical to success, in part to ensure that they don't fight against you."

People go from ministry to ministry with their boss, explained Claudia Peña. "The concept of personal loyalty is critical. If someone gets a job somewhere else, it is seen as a personal betrayal," she said. "My team really backed me up, defended and supported me, and when I decided to resign, they felt that I had abandoned them. In many ways, the project you are working on takes second place to these relationships." Javier Arevilca works at the state housing agency. "Personal loyalty is incredibly important in this system. Being able to trust people is critical because if mistakes are made, you need to have people who will cover it up," he said. "The leadership moves with all their people which generates inefficiencies and delays, increases administrative costs and is a huge problem because it takes up to a year to get it all in place." These dynamics reflect a highly personalized bureaucracy, built on webs of personal connections and trust, rather than professional competence.

Ministerial coordination

Any government comprises a collection of ministries and agencies, each one with a different leadership, objectives (which frequently overlap) and culture. Even though they can be competitors for limited government resources, the existence of shared ideologies and cross-governmental networks exerts a counterweight pushing an administration towards interdependence and cooperation. The degree that this coherence is achieved makes an important contribution to governmental performance (Centeno et al. 2017).

In Bolivia's case, different ministries have widely different administrative capacities (see Briebe, 2018) and rivalries between ministries are long-standing. The former Minister of Justice highlighted how difficult it was to coordinate between the four vice-ministries under her leadership, let alone with other ministries (Rodríguez Romero: 329).

David Aruquipa recalls: "With *Vivir Bien*, a concept which cuts across the government, we discovered that Ministries tried to compete for resources related to it and were uninterested in coordination with others." Juan Tellez reports that, "Perhaps the most serious problem we faced was the lack of coordination between Ministries and agencies. Each has a distinct mandate and those in the Ministry often follow it slavishly without any overall vision. It was almost impossible for one Ministry to understand the focus of another. They were like parallel railway lines that never crossed."

Political opportunism

When MAS expanded into urban areas after 2002, political operatives of all stripes climbed onboard, gradually transforming it into a more traditional party with clientelism and patronage at its core. “Now it’s our turn” was commonly heard in MAS’s early years as union leaders and government employees alike assumed they would share in the spoils that participating in Bolivia’s government had always brought. Top government leadership continuously decried this tendency, but never formally invested time and resources in reforming public administration.

Casimira Rodríguez Romero (2015: 314) recalls her first day as minister: “Many people wanted to heap praise on me, perhaps to protect themselves and the space they had carved out so that they wouldn’t lose their jobs”. The anonymous interviewee from the Ministry of Rural Development said: “The rightwing person who handed the ministry over to me, appeared several months later saying he would be a candidate of our political party for the Assembly. The opportunism was that blatant.” Javier Arevilica suggests that “we could reduce the rampant opportunism if there was greater stability in jobs.”

The anonymous interviewee in the Vice-Presidency said: “What makes me cynical about the sincerity of some people’s political commitment is that they only have their jobs because of their party affiliation. I’ve worked with people who were useless at their jobs and have only a skin-deep political allegiance. But even if they know nothing about politics they figure they can get ahead by pushing themselves within the party. Part of the hope is that this will add to your job security.”

“While a different social class is benefiting from government jobs and assistance than the one that did in the past, the mechanism is the same as in the past,” contends Juan Tellez. Alejandro Almaraz recounts that “there was an enormous pressure to give people jobs – they expected them – completely unrelated to whether or not they had the skills or abilities. This created conflicts and meant we lost a whole lot of time. These habits within the Bolivian state are difficult to overcome, but I believe with sufficient focus, not impossible.”

Corruption

Bolivia has always ranked high on international corruption ratings. Though notoriously difficult to assess, Transparency International reported a slight but steady downturn in its corruption perception index for Bolivia, advancing from 117 in 2005 to 112 by 2017 (see www.transparency.org/country/BOL). The country’s first Ministry of Transparency, set up in 2006, has exposed several major scandals involving government officials, something that had never occurred before.

But combating corruption remains difficult in a country where clientelism and patronage are so deeply entrenched. Current Betanzos mayor Juan Tellez recounts that in almost three years in office he continually

encounters people seeking local contracts who are “confused and disoriented by my refusal to take a bribe”.

In 2012, Bolivia adopted a new and more extensive corruption law, but it has had a mixed success. The anonymous interviewee explained: “Despite the eleven steps required to fulfill the Marcelo Quiroga anti-corruption law, corruption is still not controlled. Unfortunately, the law generates inertia: it’s better not to do anything because if you don’t act, it is less likely to get you into trouble further down the line. We have a lot of the micro-corruption – someone will buy a \$500 printer but then get a receipt that says it cost \$700 and split the profit with the provider. It’s just the way business is done”. The anonymous interviewee in the Rural Development Ministry links what he calls the “huge problem with corruption in this country” with the lack of “ideological orientation of the new middle classes”. Denouncing corruption could cost an employee his or her job and administrators frequently complain of employees who clock in without actually working.

The onerous requirements to fulfill anti-corruption regulations lead to a lot of skirting of rules to get things done. “It’s not like you’re doing something illegal but you’re using a loophole that you shouldn’t be allowed to, but that was unreasonable in the first place. “You end up with no continuity on your staff if you don’t do these kinds of these things,” explained the anonymous interviewee in the Vice-Presidency. “This is part of the fragility of the bureaucracy.” Added to this is the ease with which a rival or enemy can be brought down by corruption accusations; the assumption is that the charges must be true.

Separation between party and government

The overlap between party and government is endemic in Bolivia, and the MAS government has failed to address it. Jose Luis Perreira of the Banco Unión⁷ explained: “We lived in a constant political campaign, focused on isolated public works but not on the development of a coherent program. This was not so strong at the beginning but became more pronounced over time. Decisions are often based on a calculation of the potential political cost for the party– even when it is clearly something that should be done for the country. The focus was always on elections and getting votes.” Those who work in the bureaucracy are expected to turn out for political events and are allowed to take time off work to do so. This role of the bureaucracy as a source of party and campaign support was found by Gringerich (2013) throughout South America.

Javier Arevilica added: “For political reasons, the new housing projects will be about 70 per cent urban. The idea is to capture votes in places that are very critical of the government. We had to abandon the plan we had.” Walter Delgadillo explained that “projects were selected on the basis of

⁷ Banco Unión is a Bolivian state-controlled lender founded in 1979 and based in La Paz.

which would be most popular and gain the most votes, rather than economic or social criteria.”

Caudillismo

In MAS party meetings and congresses, participants rarely engage in ideological debates, rather they address themselves directly to their leader, Evo Morales. This pressure to speak to ‘the’ leader translates down to all levels of government, as Casimira Rodríguez explains in relation to her current job as head of Social Services for the Department of Cochabamba: “Everyone wants to talk to me because they don’t trust anyone else. They feel they have to talk to the person at the top of the organization always. I lose a lot of time dealing with individual cases.”

The desire not to criticize the boss is deep-seated. Alberto Borda recounts: “In 2009 Evo didn’t want to accept a credit from the World Bank because he said he didn’t want the bureaucracy to grow. No minister explained to him that funding planning does have not to worsen bureaucracy. No one had enough guts to explain why this work should continue.”

At the root of these problems lie what is often called *caudillismo*, which refers to a populist leader with varying degrees of authoritarianism. This political style, a legacy of Spanish colonialism, is common throughout Latin America. Claudia Peña sees *caudillismo* as a necessary evil. “We can’t avoid it because we come from a colonialized culture where the power of the state is always questioned. There are parts of this country where the state presence is very weak. We have a caudillo like Evo not because we’re crazy, but because this is a result of our historical experience.”

David Aruquipa added: “I think that we all rallied around Evo, more than around the party. He was what inspired us to imagine something very different in our country.” Jose Luis Perreira thinks that “We have become too focused on a single person, who has embodied the process.” Tom Kruse argues, “On the left, we don’t take seriously enough the issue of the leader’s character—but it is critical. Evo has left a huge imprint on the system, filling in spaces of the state when institutions don’t or can’t function. In a radical movement, it’s not about the individual, but individuals radically matter.”

Relationship with social movements

The MAS party was initially largely horizontal in its decision-making, but as it gradually expanded to urban areas in the early 2000’s, it shifted from its original membership through a local organization, such as a union, to direct membership, which marked a swing away from social movement control (Komadina Rimassa and Geffroy, 2007). In the first MAS government, affiliated social movements made recommendations for ministerial appointments or replacements, but in practice these were never accepted (Mayorga, 2015). With a few exceptions, as time went on, technocrats with no links to grassroots organizations took over key positions.

Government domination of social movements has grown steadily. The 2008 eastern uprising drove the creation of the *Coordinadora Nacional por el Cambio* (National Coordinator for Change, CONALCAM). The Unity Pact was founded by five indigenous peoples' organizations. The move gave the government more control over the leadership of rural and urban organizations, which both steadily lost their independence (Zuazo, 2009). CONALCAM was supposed to channel demands from social movements, comment on proposed laws, train a new generation of leaders, and sanction leaders or movement militants who created conflict (Mayorga, 2011). In practice however, the government has relied on a series of summits for social movement input, a process it controls from setting the agenda, deciding who to invite, and publishing the results (Wolff, 2017).

In 2011, indigenous organizations across the country divided over a proposed road construction through a lowland indigenous territory. The two most indigenous-oriented organizations aligned with the MAS, CIDOB and then CONAMAQ, officially split with the government, although sectors of both organizations remained pro-MAS and received significant injections of government funds (Achtenberg, 2016). The three organizations (CSTUCB, *Interculturales* and Bartolinas), known as the triplets, that remained loyal to the MAS, became increasingly reminiscent of the state-indigenous paternalism that has its roots during the colonial period but was consolidated during the MNR government in the 1950s and early 1960s.⁸

The current situation does not mean that social movements have not played a critical role. The MAS's original plan was formulated according to Freddy Condo, "through various congresses of the MAS. So there was a plan – a long and involved process. The challenge we faced was how to execute it." Alejandro Almaraz recounted that his Vice-Ministry "worked with the Unity Pact,⁹ and I would call it a type of irregular and precarious co-governing because it was never officially recognized within the government." Casimira Rodríguez Romero (2015: 340) recalls: "We needed social movement organizations to bring programmatic ideas forward, but this was not simple. These organizations had to figure how to move from protest to proposals, which was a whole new terrain for them. They were used to demanding and if they didn't receive it, blockading"

In contrast, Claudia Peña feels that "one of the most important things we achieved is that the president and the ministers regularly meet and listen to the people. Thanks to this I think that the state has a knowledge and understanding of the country that is ten times higher than previous

⁸ After the 1952 Revolution the government sought to make unions beholden to the MNR party, a strategy that mimics similar tactics in other parts of Latin America, for example with PRI-controlled organizations in Mexico (see Zegada and Komadina, 2017)

⁹ Formed in 2004, the Unity Pact comprised Bolivia's indigenous peoples' organizations. The Unity Pact was a coalition in the best sense of the word: it respected the autonomy of its individual members while collectively forming something more than merely the sum of its parts (Garcés, 2010).

governments. This detailed knowledge and appreciation of how diverse this country is one of the things to admire in this process.”

For the former minister, “a parliament of social movements within the government should have made the political decisions. Those of us from the middle class who ran non-governmental organizations ought not have run ministries, but rather worked as advisors providing technical support to social movements. In this way the government wouldn’t have distanced itself from the social movements as it has now.”

“The majority of our revolutionaries and militants got absorbed into the government bureaucracy instead of accompanying indigenous peasant organizations in their regions,” he continued. “Popular organizations started as unions, but when they became a political movement they accepted that a technocratic class would govern. They didn’t realize that this class would be distant from the social movements and would have its own vision that it would increasingly impose on society.”

Tom Kruse noted: “I didn’t see much political maturity in the social movements, in part because the organizational structures inhibit that maturity developing. In government, you are running so fast with so little sleep that your relationships with social movements becomes transactional and superficial.” Walter Delgadillo felt that there was some success in overcoming “a totally arbitrary and politicized hiring system” that responded to social movement pressure to incorporate people into the bureaucracy, but it didn’t go far enough.

Women and indigenous people

As the MAS government’s project was the first and most extensive in South America to prioritize indigenous, rural peoples and women, their success in this area is important to consider, and was an issue raised by about half of the respondents. Not only has the MAS appointed an unprecedented number of women and indigenous people to high posts, the 2009 Constitution make Bolivia second in the world in women’s Congressional representation – 48 per cent between the house and the Senate in the 2014 election (Farthing, 2015).

Casimira Rodríguez Romero (2015:348) reports: “A wall was broken down. It is a very important step – if we hadn’t elected Evo, I would never, ever be sitting in the seat that I’m in right now – because of where I come from, because I don’t have a title, and because I’m a woman.” She continued: “But the discriminatory attitudes remained to the point of assaults on women in politics.” The anonymous interviewee in the Supreme Electoral Tribunal reports that “in the past few months, physical attacks on women legislators have increased.”

Changing a deep-seated *machista* society has been a challenge for women on the left. Claudia Peña explains: “For all of us as women, our proposals were also seen not as political recommendations but based on some kind of emotional reaction. We weren’t taken seriously. And we have to prove

all the time to people that even though we are women, we really are authorities.” The former Minister of Rural Development confirmed this: “Even with historic levels of participation by women, indigenous and the young, we still have real ideological problems breaking down the barriers.”

Tom Kruse agrees: “The racism on the left in Bolivia is horrendous. Even though there is an official rhetoric that you can’t mistreat indigenous people, the government still does. We had a series of indigenous and female ministers and vice-ministers who were seen as symbolic appointments. No one expected them to get anything done. And they were savaged by the leaders at the top. How can you justify putting movement leaders in these positions and then mistreating them?”

Javier Arevilca, who is of indigenous heritage, explained that “when I first worked in the government, people couldn’t accept that I might know more than them because I have a PhD in Economics. They just saw me through the lens of their prejudices towards Indians.”

On a more positive side in terms of breaking down class barriers, Claudia Peña notes that “one of the things that I think is great about this process is that we don’t value a person’s academic formation above everything else. Your knowledge can be based on your experience and for the first time, that is valued.”

Several of the interviewees, and all of the women, spoke about creating a different kind of culture within the government. Casimira Rodríguez Romero (2015: 341) recalled one of her best experiences: “We started to work as a real team, paying attention to each other and doing personal presentations on who we are, about our identities, and why we were in the ministry, what each of us hoped to contribute to the political project in general, and in particular to this office. We spent several hours creating a community space, all out of office hours, but it made a much more congenial and collegial work environment and we succeeded in breaking the ice between us as a team.” This was the exception rather than the rule in most Ministries. Tom Kruse reports: “We didn’t know how to take care of each other ourselves in any meaningful way.”

Claudia Peña added: “My experience is that women are more focused on consensus, while men are more likely to impose their authority. But real authority is not based on fear, it’s based on trust.” The anonymous interviewee in the Electoral Tribunal agreed with this assessment. “The political process has a very male logic. Women have a different way of doing politics. But that is not taken seriously in this government,” she said.

Lessons for progressive movements

As the interviews suggest, public servants in Bolivia are torn between serving the public, personal interest and party loyalty. These tensions absorb a great deal of time and energy for all involved, and reduce state capacity and performance, hindering the implementation of a politically progressive project. The failure to focus attention on the process, rather than only the outcome, has thwarted planning, the deepening of a social and economic justice agenda and developing a shared vision of societal transformation.

State efficiency and performance have never been a priority in Bolivian government or politics. Rather the focus has been on extracting benefits from holding office and retaining power. In the absence of an explicit and concerted effort to change the country's political culture and practice, these historical origins have significantly constrained the MAS government's ability to achieve its goals of creating a more equalitarian society. The challenge the MAS faced was to strengthen the state not only by extending its reach and capacity, but also by creating a government that effectively reflected Bolivia's diversity and heterogeneity (PNUD, 2007). An unreformed state prevented making government more participatory and increasing the power of social movements and communities.

Several of the interviewees mentioned the weakness of the idea of public service in Bolivia. "I think it is critical that we as progressive people keep a strong sense of public service at the center of our work – no matter what our personal ambitions might be," said Juan Tellez. "This is a difficult balance, but critical to advancing a progressive political project, one that is committed to improving the lives of marginalized peoples, protecting the environment and so on. We don't cultivate this desire to serve, rather than to be served, enough among our young people."

As for advice to other progressives assuming government office, the respondents almost without exception mentioned the importance of keeping an ethical core intact. Alejandro Almaraz expressed this as: "No matter where you are, you can't be on the left if your ethics are the same as everyone else. It is critical to keep these principles close to you in the face of the inevitable obstacles." Casimira Rodríguez highlighted that, "for me, the most important thing is to put your commitment and ethics first. What is correct is correct, no more or less. You must stay true to your values and be transparent." Freddy Condo agreed: "The most important thing are your principles and that you are holding true to what you believe. Despite the pressures from family clans or international organizations, I needed to answer to the president, to the social organizations and to the grassroots."

Others suggested the importance of setting attainable goals. "Don't become so convinced that you are going break all the old patterns and rules of the past, that you pay too little attention to the inevitable contradictions that exist in every government," said a former minister. Several respondents noted that any proposed programmatic agenda needs to be socialized by working from

the bases up. “Presenting the national goals for 2025 was not enough. It needed to be broadly discussed and analyzed before it was adopted, and it wasn’t.”

Also raised was the importance of staying attune to generational changes. “You have to realize that this country is full of young people,” said Javier Arevilca, “with their cell phones and their social networks. We have to change our ways of doing things to accommodate this new reality.” Walter Delgadillo added: “The old conception of social movements as representatives of almost all the population is over. They have increasingly become a minority sharply defined by their sectoral interests.”

Not relying on the party or its leadership as the only mechanism for social change was stressed by several respondents. “Reduce the role of the party in the process,” said one. Others suggested the importance of developing a diverse leadership so as to avoid the trap of *caudillismo*.

Underlying this discussion about how to administer a progressive project in government is the issue of wielding power, in the case of the MAS, rather unexpectedly and most certainly as the interviewees all commented, unprepared. In a 2009 interview, sociologist Silvia Rivera highlighted the MAS “fascination with power” (Farthing, 2009). This has only increased in the succeeding eleven years, reflecting how a self-defined left government has spent too little time analyzing how gaining power can distort a progressive project and in establishing mechanisms to control the universal tendency to concentrate power and make top-down policy decisions.

This study shows that preparing for power and what it implies, examining more closely how to transform the state and better train progressives in the mechanics and ethics of public administration are inherent to a truly transformative radical project. It also suggests that without a concerted effort at reforming how governing is conducted rather than a focus only on the concrete outcomes, entrenched unjust structures and relationships will persist.

Developing the political and personal maturity to exercise power is central to success. Bolivia’s experience points to the challenges provoked by a lamentable, if somewhat understandable, inability to examine, critique and transform the way power is deployed. For Jose Perreira this had significant consequences. “The MAS had a huge backing, and I don’t think we took enough advantage of it”, he said. “I’m satisfied with what we accomplished, but it has been far more limited than what I hoped for.”

Interviewees

- Claudia Peña Claros, ex-Minister of Autonomy
- Bismarck Javier Arevilca Vasquez, ex-Ministry of Finance, currently Chief Financial Analyst for the State Housing Agency – Ministry of Public Works, Services and Housing
- David Aruquipa, ex- director of Cultural Patrimony, Ministry of Culture
- Casimira Rodríguez, Ex-Minister of Justice; currently Director of SEDEGES – Social services agency for the Cochabamba Department
- Tom Kruse, ex-Consultant, South American Community of nations (UNASUR), Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Juan Téllez, ex-consultant, Ministry of Planning; current Mayor of Betanzos (Potosi)
- Alberto Borda, ex-Vice-Minister of Planning; and Cochabamba Department Autonomy Director; current Director of Planning at the Sacaba municipality
- Freddy Condo, ex Vice-Minister of Lands; former consultant to the Unity Pact
- Jose Luis Perreira, former Director at Banco Union, currently Director of Swiss Cooperation (COSUDE)
- Walter Delgadillo, ex-union leader Central Obrera Boliviana; ex Minister of Labour and subsequently Public Works. Currently working as an advisor to the Cochabamba Departmental government.
- Alejandro Almaraz, former Vice-Minister of Land
- Anonymous, Supreme Electoral Tribunal
- Anonymous, Vice-Presidency of Bolivia
- Anonymous, Ministry of Rural Development, Land, Water and Coca

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When the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement towards Socialism, MAS) led by coca grower leader Evo Morales won elections in Bolivia late in 2005 on a social and economic justice platform, its rapid rise to power was propelled by social movements that ranked among the world's most radical. One of several 'pink tide' governments that have held office in Latin America during the last fifteen years, Bolivia's new government inherited an impoverished country, the most indigenous in South America, with a weak state and little infrastructure, where 500 years of relentless resource extraction from silver to soy has bequeathed a legacy of severe environmental degradation. A primary commodity exporter with a small internal market, Bolivia holds a peripheral position in the global political economy, with deep, but highly unequal integration into the international economic system.

This publication focuses on the role played by Bolivian left state officials or bureaucrats and the challenges they faced in advancing a social and economic justice agenda. Despite the external constraints they face, progressive bureaucrats play a critical role in implementing more equitable policies under left governments. Their perspectives on the challenges to effective policy design and implementation extend beyond the confines of their specific jobs to incorporate a broader critique of how social change is implemented (or not) through government initiatives. Their contribution to understanding the policy implementation process in low-income societies is at the heart of this report.

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