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Plagemann, Johannes; Heras Rodríguez, Carlos; Destradi, Sandra

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Populist foreign policy and mobilization in Bolivia

Johannes Plagemann[1]
johannes.Plagemann@giga-hamburg.de
German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Hamburg, Germany

Carlos Heras Rodríguez[2]
cheras@colmex.mx
El Colegio de México, A. C., Ciudad de México, México

Sandra Destradi[3]
sandra.destradi@politik.uni-freiburg.de
University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany

The goal of this article is to explore the role of mobilization in the foreign policies of populists in power. To do so, we focus on the main features and changes of Bolivia's foreign Policy under its populist president Evo Morales (2006-2019) with regard to its two most prominent conflictive bilateral relations, with the US and Chile. In both domains, Morales departed from the foreign policy of previous governments. By ending cooperation with the US, the Morales government sought to establish a sovereign counternarcotics policy in line with its core constituency's demands of legalizing coca crops. On the key issue of relations with Chile, seeking to negotiate a sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean, the Morales government exhibited more continuity initially. However, by referring the stalemated conflict to the International Court of Justice, Morales eventually changed his country's approach to finding a resolution. Tracing Morales' discourse over time we outline how domestic politics and foreign policy are intertwined in populist discourse and how foreign policy issues are used for domestic political mobilization. This was most evident

[1] Dr. Johannes Plagemann is research fellow at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg. He works on the intersection of International Relations, Foreign Policy Analysis, and Area Studies.

[2] Carlos Heras Rodríguez holds a Master's degree in Political Science from the Center for International Studies, El Colegio de México. He holds a degree in Journalism and Audiovisual Communication from Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.

[3] Dr. Sandra Destradi holds the Chair of International Relations at the University of Freiburg, Germany. Previously, she was a Professor of International Relations and Regional Governance at the Helmut Schmidt University and a Senior Research Fellow at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA). Her research interests include the impact of populism on foreign policy and international politics, issues of regional security, and the role of emerging powers in global governance.

in the case of relations with the US, where Morales intensified his populist as well as hostile rhetoric in periods of domestic political instability. In the case of relations with Chile, the relationship was more nuanced. Importantly, neither does populist mobilization over foreign policy matters necessarily drive foreign policy change, nor does it preclude genuine bilateral dialogue.

Keywords: *populism, Bolivia, foreign policy, mobilization, US, Chile, coca*

Política exterior populista y movilización en Bolivia

El objetivo de este artículo es explorar el papel de la movilización en la política exterior de los populistas en el poder. Para ello, nos centramos en las principales características y cambios de la política exterior de Bolivia bajo su presidente populista Evo Morales (2006-2019) con respecto a sus dos relaciones bilaterales conflictivas más destacadas, con EE.UU. y Chile. En ambos ámbitos, Morales se apartó de la política exterior de gobiernos anteriores. Al poner fin a la cooperación con EE.UU., el gobierno de Morales buscó establecer una política antinarcóticos soberana en línea con las demandas de su electorado de legalizar los cultivos de coca. En el tema clave de las relaciones con Chile, que busca negociar un acceso soberano al océano Pacífico, el gobierno de Morales mostró inicialmente más continuidad. Sin embargo, al remitir el estancado conflicto a la Corte Internacional de Justicia, Morales cambió finalmente el enfoque de su país para encontrar una solución. Siguiendo el discurso de Morales a lo largo del tiempo, esbozamos cómo la política interior y la política exterior se entrelazan en el discurso populista y cómo las cuestiones de política exterior se utilizan para la movilización política interna. Esto fue más evidente en el caso de las relaciones con Estados Unidos, donde Morales intensificó su retórica populista y hostil en períodos de inestabilidad política interna. En el caso de las relaciones con Chile, la relación fue más matizada. Es importante señalar que ni la movilización populista en materia de política exterior impulsa necesariamente el cambio de la política exterior, ni impide un verdadero diálogo bilateral.

Palabras claves: *populismo, Bolivia, política exterior, movilización, Estados Unidos, Chile, coca*

Introduction

> "I want to take this opportunity to openly say to the Bolivian people and the world that they will not tell us again, from the US Embassy, with which country we will have relationships and with which country we won't" (Evo Morales, second term inauguration speech 22/01/2010).

Bolivia's populist president Evo Morales (2006-2019) radically changed his country's foreign policy. Under his presidency, the country reduced US state presence to a minimum and bet on regional integration along with fellow leftist and populist governments, but not only. Bolivia actively participated in Brazil-led Union of South American Nations (Unasur), Venezuela-led Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA), and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), while promoting its own initiatives in multilateral organizations. Bolivia under Morales also established or deepened links with non-regional partners such as China, Russia, and Iran.

This paper explores how and under whatconditions foreign policy is used for mobilization in Bolivia under the left-wing populist leader Morales (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). It thus contributes to a growing body of literature that aims to make sense of the impact of populism on foreign policy. Despite rapid advances of this field in recent years, the actual processes and mechanisms that connect the formation of a populist government to shifts in its foreign policy are still not sufficiently understood. This paper contributes to the debate by addressing one key mechanism: mobilization. As we will discuss below, the mobilization of political support at the domestic level is a typical feature of populists in power, and the existing literature has started to recognize that a particularly close intertwining of domestic politics and foreign policy is an important feature of populist governments. In this article, we propose a theoretical framework that helps us explore the links between domestic political mobilization and foreign policy change under populist governments. We apply our theoretical framework to the analysis of populist mobilization and foreign policy change in two bilateral relationsships under Morales.

The case of Bolivia is interesting for a number of reasons: for one, it is relatively understudied as compared to more prominent cases of (left-wing) populism like Venezuela under Chávez. More importantly, it constitutes a particularly hard test case for our mechanism given the relative weakness and small size of Bolivia as a country, which would normally lead us to expect foreign policy to be strongly driven by structural constraints, with little room for change when a new government comes to power. The analysis focuses on the field of conflict behavior broadly understood, addressing two of the most important issues in Bolivian foreign policy over the past years: the bilateral relationship with the United States and the territorial dispute with Chile over access to the sea. In order to analyze to what extent and in which

ways these conflicts were the object of domestic mobilization efforts, we carried out a qualitative content analysis of a text corpus of Morales' speeches and statements thereby tracing his public discourse over time. Our findings support the theoretical expectations of a particularly close inter-relation between domestic and foreign politics under populist governments. Moreover, populist mobilization via references to foreign policy is particularly pronounced in times of domestic challenges, thus supporting findings from the 'rally around the flag' literature. However, mobilization does not necessarily drive foreign policy change under populist governments, but rather accompanies it.

Populism, foreign policy, and mobilization: A theoretical framework

Our understanding of populism is based on approaches from the field of Comparative Politics that regard populism as a set of ideas or a 'thin-centered ideology' (Mudde 2004a, 2017). In this 'ideational approach', populism 'considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and […] argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people' (Mudde 2004b, p. 543). Anti-elitism and people-centrism are therefore crucial elements of populism as a thin ideology, which is usually combined with a distinctive 'thick' or full-fledged ideology, such as ethno-nationalism or, in the case of Bolivia, socialism. The literature on populism in power asks what the consequences of populists forming governments are. And it argues that populist leaders who have been voted into power face a specific challenge: they are now the political elite, the very 'establishment' against which they were previously campaigning. Against this backdrop, in order to keep their credibility and to continue generating support in line with their thin ideology, they need to find new ways of mobilizing their followers (Urbinati 2019). As Müller (2017, p. 41) argues, populists are continuously on the campaign trail, they cannot stop mobilizing. This is ultimately related to the democratic qualities of the phenomenon of populism, in which parties and leaders have the ambition to keep winning elections.

Different strands in the literature on populism have addressed the issue of populist mobilization. Jansen proposes to focus on populist mobilization as the very essence of populism itself. To him, populist mobilization is a political project combining popular mobilization – i.e., the publicly visible activation of ordinarily marginalized sections of society – with populist rhetoric, i.e., an 'anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes ordinary people' (Jansen 2011, p. 82). Studies of Latin American populism in particular have emphasized the potential of populism in activating largely unorganized masses. According to Weyland, for instance, a populist leader 'seeks or exercises power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers' (Weyland 2001, p. 14). Thus, the principal source of power for populism as a strategy is mass support that hinges

on the capabilities of a populist leader to mobilize (Weyland 2017, 2001, pp. 13–14). Similarly, Roberts claimed that populism consists of 'top-down political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge elite groups on behalf of an ill-defined pueblo, or "the people"' (Roberts 2007, p. 5). While networks and societal organizations can play an important role in driving bottom-up mobilization (De la Torre 2008: 28), and they do so in the case of Bolivia, in this study we especially focus on its top-down aspect: we are interested in how a populist government and particularly its leader resorts to foreign policy issues to generate domestic political support. Indeed, among the many issues that can be used for political mobilization, foreign policy can play an important role, especially if a unified 'people' is pitted against some external 'others', potentially connected to a domestic elite – and this will be particularly relevant in international conflicts and disputes. So far, the literature on populism and international conflict behavior has pointed out that different understandings of populism would lead us to expect populists to pursue a more conflict-prone foreign policy (see Destradi et al. 2021). For one, populists' claim that they are literally embodying the 'popular will' (Urbinati 2019) makes any kind of concessions in international disputes appear as both a personal failure of the populist leader and a betrayal of the people he/she represents. The ideational approach also emphasizes populists' Manichean worldview (Hawkins 2009; Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), i.e., their tendency to see the world in friend/enemy dichotomies, which also hampers international compromises. Other theorizations of populism lead to similar expectations: stylistic approaches to populism emphasize populists' tendency to conjure up crises and to adopt an antagonistic discourse (e.g., Moffitt 2015); and discursive approaches highlight populists' reliance on the construction of 'others' and of internal and external enemies of the people (e.g., Wojczewski 2020).

However, previous research has shown that not all populists pursue more aggressive or less cooperative policies across the board (Destradi and Plagemann 2019). We argue that one possible reason for this variation has to do with domestic politics and with the issue of mobilization. As populists will strongly intertwine the domestic and the international in their policies, they will pay particular attention to the question of what foreign policy issues might generate support amongst the constituencies they aim to mobilize. Mobilization would then be an important mechanism in explaining variations in foreign policy change under populist governments, as populists might choose to pursue more conflictive policies on issues that matter to their audience and with which they can best mobilize domestic support. By contrast, conflicts and issues that are less salient to a domestic audience might rather be ignored by populist governments, thereby also allowing for continuity in foreign policy. To be sure, mobilization over foreign policy issues is not an exclusive prerogative of populist governments: the literatures on the diversionary theory of war and on the rally-around-the-flag effect tell us that all kinds of governments might use international disputes to unify a country and increase support for the government (for an overview see, for instance, Tir 2010). Yet, as discussed above, populists in power can be expected to have a particular incentive to keep mobilizing beyond electoral campaigning, also

once they are in government, in oder to divert attention from their transition from underdogs to statesmen. Moreover, given populism's other features – its rejection of elite expertise in particular – we expect populists to be more open towards the use of foreign policy issues for mobilization than non-populist leaders who are more wary of mixing foreign and domestic politics. We can thus reasonably expect a particularly sustained use of foreign policy issues in populists' domestic mobilization efforts.

A systematic comparison of the role of foreign policy issues in the political campaigning of populist and non-populist leaders is beyond the scope of this contribution. Nonetheless, given the considerations above, we have reasons to expect that populist leaders will be particularly prone to use foreign policy as a mobilizing device. Indeed, we presume that populists will only vigorously adopt foreign policies, including by way of publicly speaking about them, that they find useful for mobilization. In other words, we expect populists to choose more conflictive policies on issues that matter to their audience and with which they can best mobilize domestic support because they lend themselves to the populist repertoire of anti-elitism and anti-pluralism. By contrast, conflicts and issues that are less salient to a domestic audience will be ignored by populist governments. Moreover, we also expect populist governments to resort to mobilization related to foreign policy issues in particular when they are under pressure domestically. If their authority is called into question, they need to prove even more forcefully that they are the embodiment of the 'true people' and that they act to protect the people from evil elites and international enemies, thereby intensifying mobilization and potentially escalating international disputes.

Importantly, we expect populist mobilization to have an impact in driving foreign policy change, but under an important scope condition: a populist government's perception of its own vulnerability in international politics. As Brun et al. (Brun et al. 2022, p. 96) put it with specific reference to Latin American cases, '[t]he empirical study of the Latin American experiences reveals that, while discourse is critical and incendiary, the practice of the foreign policy is more orthodox and pragmatic. This is so because the populist character is mitigated by the position of nondominant countries in the world system'. As in other theories of foreign policy, we therefore presume that a state's perception of its relative strength affects its foreign behavior. In fact, populists are unlikely to pursue entirely erratic and irrational policies that are bound to politically harm them. They will be sensitive to the structural constraints imposed upon them by limitations of their own government's power vis-à-vis individual foreign partners and adversaries or by the depth and functional importance of their countries' regional and global integration. More precisely, as political entrepreneurs, populists will weigh the benefits from using a specific foreign policy issue as a mobilizing device against its potentially negative impacts on their government's popularity and room for maneuver.

Bolivia's Relations with the United States and Chile

Before moving on to analyze Bolivia's foreign policy, we need to focus on the specific features of Evo Morales' populism. Morales combined a populist thin ideology with a leftwing, anti-imperialist and indigenist thick ideology. His agenda involved the nationalization of natural gas fields and other strategic assets, the redistribution of wealth through direct transfers, and the defense of indigenous rights and their political representation. Morales and his party, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), combined inclusive appeals to indigenous ethnic identities in Bolivia with a pronounced anti-establishment discourse, an anti-neoliberal economic agenda, and a focus on the popular classes (Madrid 2012). Like Chávez, Morales used an anti-imperialist discourse and condemned the presence of foreign powers linked to the local oligarchy while identifying with the common people and promoting the incorporation of indigenous peoples and coca growers opposed to the US-promoted war on drugs (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, pp. 164–165). The MAS is considered a dual party whose rural organization reflected a bottom-up pattern of mobilization while its dynamics in urban areas resemble a 'populist machine' operating with top-down and co-optive practices (Anria 2013, p. 21). As a populist leader, Morales antagonized the domestic political elites generally, and established parties that had been governing the country before the MAS took power, in particular. Moreover, he habitually characterized Bolivia's most influential international partner, the US, as a foreign power meddling in national politics.

US: from intense cooperation to rupture

Relations with the US were friendly before Morales took office, especially in Bolivia's 20-year period of market-oriented multiparty democracy (1985-2005). The US had been a crucial donor throughout the Cold War (Field 2014; Zambrana Marchetti 2017-2018). By 1964 Bolivia had become the second highest per capita recipient of US aid in the world (Field 2014, p. 3). After the end of the Cold War, such aid was linked to the US' 'war on drugs', which combined eradication (of crops), interdiction (of producing, consuming and exporting narcotics), and the promotion of alternative development (Gillies 2020, p. 84). With strong US support, Bolivia was relieved of much of its bilateral debt in the late 1990s (International Monetary Fund 10/4/1998; Seelke 2014).

In 2005, the Movimiento al Socialismo won the national election with the first clear single-party majority (53% in the first round) since the restoration of democracy in the 1980s. The MAS was founded ten years earlier by peasant unions and especially promoted by coca grower unions from the tropical lands of the central region of Cochabamba (Grisaffi 2019; Anria 2019; Zuazo 2009). Relations with the US deteriorated soon after the new government under President Morales was formed. Up to that point, the US had been not only a major donor country but also, by far,

Bolivia's leading arms supplier (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2022). In 2006, the Bush administration reduced military aid to Bolivia by 96% in response to the refusal of the Bolivian Congress to ratify a bilateral agreement exempting US military personnel from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. One year later, Bolivia announced its exiting from the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, previously known as the US Army School of the Americas (St John 2020, pp. 172–173).

However, the major bone of contention was the issue of coca cultivation. Morales, who had been a coca grower leader himself, opposed the forced eradication of coca crops. Instead, he declared that his government would substantially expand legal coca cultivation. Once in power, the new government permitted the cultivation of coca leaves in two areas of the country under fixed limits and norms, following a 'coca yes, cocaine no' approach. The new framework aimed to commercialize coca crops for licit uses while interdicting cocaine production and promoting voluntary eradication (Seelke 2014, p. 4; Grisaffi 2019, chapter 5). Whereas international partners such as the European Union and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime continued to cooperate with Bolivia on the matter, the new policy aroused vocal opposition in Washington. From 2008 onwards, the US State Department designated Bolivia as a country that 'failed demonstrably' to adhere to the obligations undertaken under international counternarcotic agreements (United States Department of State 9/16/2008). In 2007, the US embassy announced a substantial cut in counter-narcotics aid to Bolivia, from 45 USD million budgeted for 2006 to 33.8 USD million in 2007 (Gamarra 2007, p. 29). Moreover, the US cancelled the preferential trade agreement with Bolivia under the Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA) (Seelke 2014, p. 7).

In a context of growing bilateral tensions, Bolivia in September 2008 expelled the US ambassador, accusing him of 'dividing the country' (Azcui 2008). At that time, domestic political disputes around the Constituent Assembly, the autonomy of Eastern regions, and the distribution of oil revenues escalated in violent clashes between supporters of the government, opposition protesters and security forces (Centellas 2013). The expulsion of the US ambassador was triggert by the fact that he had met with opposition governors of some of Bolivia's regions (departamentos). The US responded by expelling the Bolivian ambassador to Washington. The two countries have not exchanged ambassadors since then despite an intent of rapprochement during the Obama years. In 2008, Morales also announced the indefinite suspension of activities by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in Bolivia on the accusation of meddling in domestic politics, funding opposition groups and spying (La Opinión/ Agencias 2008). Over the years, relations with the US were further cut to a minimum, as in 2013 Morales also asked USAID to end its operations in the country, accusing it of 'conspiring' against the government and of funding opposition activities (Azcui 2013; Seelke 2014, p. 7). By the end of 2013, the US State Department also decided to close its Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs office

in Bolivia citing the lack of cooperation by the local authorities (Seelke 2014, p. 7). Interestingly, however, and despite Bolivia had lost ATPA trade preferences with the US, bilateral commerce between the two countries did not decrease under Morales. According to the Bolivian National Institute of Statistics (INE), Bolivian exports to the US were valued 408.8 USD million in 2005 and peaked in 2014 with 2,043.5 million.

Chile: an enduring conflict taken to international courts

Bolivia and Chile have had a complex relationship since the former lost its coastal territory to the latter in the Pacific War (1879-1884). The social imaginary of Bolivia as a landlocked country, the cultivation of a historical memory of the sea, and the aspiration to recover it explain much of Bolivia's foreign policy toward Chile over the past century (Otero and Rivas Pardo 2018). Consequently, Bolivia and Chile have not maintained full diplomatic relations since 1978 despite several processes of dialogue. Bolivia also conditioned the sale of natural gas to Argentina on a prohibition of reselling it to Chile (Gamarra 2007, p. 22), a policy that had been in place already before Morales rose to power (ANF 4/24/2004). As Bolivia's landlocked situation has co-determined its foreign agenda, most governments before Morales had sought bilateral or trilateral (including Peru) negotiations with Chile to obtain a sovereign enclave at the sea or at least some advantages in accessing Pacific ports (St John 2020).

Under Morales, Bolivia made the remarkable move of denouncing Chile before the UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague in 2013. That decision (publicly announced two years earlier) ended a process of bilateral dialogue that had unfolded under the first government of Michelle Bachelet in Chile (2006-2010). While the demand of a sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean does not appear in the 2005 MAS electoral manifesto, it does as a major goal in the 2009, 2014 and 2019 manifestos, as well as in the 2009 Constitution, whose article 267 declares the 'inalienable and imprescriptible right over the territory giving access to the Pacific Ocean and its maritime space' (Asamblea Constituyente, Congreso Nacional; MAS-IPSP 2005, 2009, 2014, 2019).

In Chile, center-left president Michelle Bachelet entered government just months after Morales amid expectations that ideological affinities would improve bilateral relations. The newly elected governments of Chile and Bolivia quickly established a joint commission to deal with bilateral issues (the 13-point agenda), reaching significant agreements in health, education, frontier integration, as well as free transit (St John 2020, p. 184). Still, Bolivia initiated proceedings before the ICJ in 2013, demanding a good faith negotiation with Chile to obtain a sovereign seaport on the Pacific coast. That decision implied a notable strategy shift on the maritime issue and, by implication, ended any bilateral dialogue. The government portrayed

this new approach to the maritime dispute as a national cause beyond ideological divisions and actively sought the counsel and collaboration of former Bolivian heads of State (St John 2020, p. 187). Notably, Carlos Mesa (president between 2003 and 2005 and the leading opposition candidate in the 2019 and 2020 presidential elections) assumed the role of international speaker for the maritime cause until the government sidelined him in 2016 after he campaigned against the referendum to allow a new candidacy of Morales by 2019.

The ICJ had to rule first whether it was competent in the maritime dispute and, after that, whether it recognized the Bolivian demand. In 2015, the Court declared itself competent in the maritime dispute (International Court of Justice, Judgement to Preliminary Objection of 9/24/2015). Nevertheless, in October 2018, the Court ruled against Bolivia, stating that Chile had not contracted any legal obligation to negotiate a sovereign access to the Pacific for Bolivia (International Court of Justice 2018, pp. 60–61). Morales recognized that the ruling did not force Chile to negotiate but argued that a paragraph in it meant that the findings of the Court should not prevent the countries to continue a dialogue, which he took as an invitation to reinstate bilateral negotiations.

In the meantime, Chile initiated proceedings before the ICJ on the Silala waters, a major river flowing from Bolivia to Chile, asking for it to be declared an international watercourse. This came as response to Morales hinting months before that Bolivia would initiate such proceedings to defend their rights over the waters (Montes 2016). Even if a minor dispute compared to the seaport issue, this turn of events in an equally decades-old controversy further worsened bilateral relations.

Qualitative content analysis: populist mobilization and conflict behavior

In order to explore the linkages between foreign policy and domestic mobilization, we analyzed the domestic political discourse by Evo Morales on the two bilateral relationships throughout his presidency (2006-2019). Our text corpus is comprised of 49 speeches and statements by Morales, of which 28 addressed relations with Chile, 24 those with the US, and three focused on both relationships. The texts were selected around key events in those relationships. They are mainly transcriptions of Morales' speeches before parliament, statements at press conferences, interviews with local and regional media, and speeches at public meetings. Most transcribed speeches were selected from a database obtained by the authors through an official petition of information to the Viceministry of Communication in Bolivia. Where we could not find transcribed speeches around such relevant events, we included press articles. The text corpus was analyzed using computer-assisted coding with the software MaxQDA, focusing on paragraphs as coded segments. We searched for segments with references to relations with Chile and the US and were interested in finding out if populist discourse entailing anti-elitism and people centrism was used

by Morales in talking about those crises to a domestic audience. We also focused on the level of hostility expressed through such statements. The aim of the analysis was to identify whether and how Morales used the tensions with the United States and Chile to mobilize domestic political support, thereby linking domestic politics and foreign policy. We proceeded by carefully reading every speech in the corpus, analyzing segments of interest according to the criteria of populist discourse and mobilization, and categorizing the most common patterns. Thereby we identified the most salient features of Morales' discourse. In parallel, we divided the almost 14 years of Morales's presidency into different periods according to changes in the tonality of Morales's discourse on relations with Chile and the US. respectively. The two case-specific periodizations allowed us to analyze how discourse changed over time as we were also interested in identifying under which conditions Bolivia used bilateral tensions for mobilizing purposes.

Morales' discourse on the United States

In essence, the Morales government clashed with US interests over its drug policy and accusations to the US government of intervening in domestic affairs. Although bilateral relations with the US were never friendly under Morales, his political discourse over the years underwent several shifts. For analytical purposes, we divide Morales' speeches into three periods (Table 1). Period 1 lasted from 2006 to 2009, when domestic conflict was more intense in Bolivia and Morales changed his country's coca policy. Period 2 goes from 2010 to the end of 2015, when internal stability was higher. Period 3 goes from 2016 to the end of the Morales presidency in late 2019, when the MAS was politically weakened after being defeated in the 2016 referendum to change the Constitution.

Table 1

Period	Discursive features
1 (2006-2009)	Denouncing US intervention, affirming sovereignty, linking opposition to the US, anti-drugs policy
2 (2010-2015)	Affirming sovereignty (contrasting with the past), denouncing US intervention, internal-external link very scarce
3 (2016-2019)	Linking opposition to the US, affirming sovereignty against US intervention

Source: Own elaboration

Period 1 During his inauguration speech before the Congress in January 2006 (22/01/2006), Morales addressed the US in friendly terms, but already called for a renewal of relations based on cooperating on different terms, particularly in the field of counternarcotics. As Bolivia announced that it would expand the area for legal coca cultivation in 2006 relations became more hostile and Morales began denouncing US intervention in domestic politics and affirming Bolivia's sovereignty, often linking the political opposition with US interests.

For example, during the constituent process in 2007, Morales made a speech before his supporters claiming: 'in the new Political Constitution of the State of Bolivia […] no country, and especially the US […] will be allowed to create military bases in Bolivia, and that for a matter of dignity' (28/01/2007). The defense of national sovereignty was intertwined with allegations of US intervention in domestic affairs. Concerning the expulsion of the US ambassador in 2008, Morales stated: 'We have taken a decision, of course, a political one, to defend our dignity […]. We realize that it has been an external conspiration headed by the ambassador of the United States, without consulting anybody nor the cabinet nor the social movements. I decided that that conspiring ambassador goes to his country' (22/01/2009). During the first years, Morales also targeted the DEA, claiming that there were 'DEA agents working in political spying, funding criminal groups to attempt on the lives of authorities, not to say the President' (La Opinión/Agencias 2008). The close link between domestic politics and foreign policy started in this phase, as Morales associated the domestic opposition with foreign interests. For instance, during months of mounting political tensions, he said:

> 'The rich, the transnational companies, the oligarchs, they also have their political instrument that defends the latifundium, the privatizations. And these days I have heard, comrades, some prefects, some civic committees that publicly say that the Government, that the President should sign a Free Trade Agreement with the US' (15/02/2008, meeting with coca growers in Cochabamba).

He also described Bolivian politics before he came to power as essentially run by the US embassy, claiming that opposing parties were little more than US proxies. In Morales' 2009 inauguration speech, referring to the time when he was expelled from Parliament in 2002, he claimed that:

> 'The expelling of Evo Morales was also broadcasted in [State TV] Channel 7, I asked myself why because I thought that people would react as they did [increasing support to the MAS] but this broadcast was made so the [US] ambassador from his Embassy could control who voted and who did not vote' (22/01/2009).

Period 2 After a turbulent phase, the years 2010-2015 were a period of domestic political stability, with support for Morales and the MAS reaching its peak. During those years, Morales kept denouncing US intervention in internal politics, while accompanying his sovereigntist discourse with actual steps to reduce US influence in the country, as exhibited in the following quote from 2013:

> 'Brothers and sisters, they probably think that they still can politically manipulate here, economically, [but] those were past times. But still some institutions of the US Embassy keep conspiring against this process, against the people and particularly against the National Government, and that is why I take the opportunity of this meeting and on May 1st, I want to inform you, we have decided to expel USAID from Bolivia' (1/05/2013).

However, interestingly, in this period Morales rarely discursively linked the internal opposition to the US. Whereas he frequently claimed that the US embassy had been running Bolivian politics in the past, he refrained from implicating his current opposition to foreign interests – presumably because political stability was not threatened, and his domestic hegemony was consolidated.

Period 3 In the later years of his presidency, from 2016 onwards, the internal political situation became more difficult for Morales and his party. Consequently, Morales in his discourse again resorted to linking his internal opponents with the US. Days before the referendum of 2016, Morales accused the US Embassy of leaking information about a private scandal, and he depicted the referendum as a fight between the Bolivian people and 'the empire':

> 'To begin the campaign in favor of the Yes, I said: this campaign is against the empire, the empire's money, I would tell you about the information we have […]. The No was born in Washington and the instructions come from there, the Bolivian people are confronted with a superpower' (13/02/2016).

Morales also accused the opposition of being incapable of autonomous action without US support, as in this speech of 2017, in which he threatened to expel the highest-ranking US diplomat remaining in the country:

> 'From the US Embassy, they have planned to attack the government, our democratic and cultural revolution, using corruption and narcotraffic. The right has no idea about how to attack us. Who does prepare it so they attack us? The US Embassy' (07/11/2017).

During that period, Morales kept denouncing the US intervention in Bolivia — even if at the time USAID, DEA and the US ambassador already had been expelled from the country. Less frequently, the President also argued that the MAS policies were actually better than past US-backed policies, a case he also made during

the controversy over his coca policy in his first years as president. In doing so, he highlighted his antiimperialist credentials against an evil foreign adversary.

Morales' discourse on Chile

Regarding Chile, we found remarkable discursive shifts corresponding to changes in the bilateral relation and the Bolivian strategy towards the maritime dispute. We propose a slightly different periodization (see Table 1) than used for the previous case. During the first period, between 2006 and 2010, Bolivia and Chile adopted a 13-point bilateral agenda, with one of the points being the issue of Bolivia's access to the sea. Morales' discourse was conciliatory during this phase. Between 2011 and 2018 (Period 2), Bolivia sought legal proceedings through the ICJ and thereby effectively ended the bilateral dialogue. Consequently, its discourse towards Chile became much more hostile, frequently accusing the neighboring country of bad faith and recalling historical affronts. Thirdly, after the ICJ order favoring Chile, Bolivia appealed to bilateral dialogue again, while re-affirming Bolivia's historic determination of recovering a sovereign access to the ocean.

Table 2

Period	Discursive features
1 (Jan 2006-March 2010)	Bilateral dialogue, constructive attitude
2 (March 2011- Oct 2018)	ICJ, hostile discourse against Chile
3 (Oct 2018- Nov 2019)	Appealing to bilateral dialogue despite ICJ rule

Source: Own elaboration

Period 1 The documents analyzed for this phase include expressions of goodwill and a constructive attitude towards Chile, with Morales invoking a 'diplomacy of the peoples'. In his inauguration day speech, Morales said: 'I trust the Chilean people, their social organizations, the understanding of that state to solve or repair that historical issue we have with Chile (22/01/2006). Elements of a more hostile discourse appeared only sporadically, mostly in characterizations of the origins of the maritime dispute as a war driven by oligarchical and foreign interests. Overall, things changed under Chile's Piñera government (2010-2014) (Paredes 2012), as the bilateral dialogue stalled and the two presidents blamed each other for the failure (Ceppi 2019, pp. 66–67). Give the lack of progress, Bolivia announced legal actions against Chile in March 2011.

Period 2 In Period 2, Morales' discourse changed substantially. Accusations of bad faith towards the Chilean government became frequent. Morales repeatedly accused Chile of not recognizing the problem of the maritime dispute, of inaction and of tactical delays. Addressing the people in a central La Paz square on the Day of the Sea, Morales explained his government's involvement of the ICJ:

> 'Against reiterated delays, non-compliance and refusals by the governments of Chile to find a definitive solution to the enforced landlocked situation of Bolivia, and facing a delaying and vacillating position, Bolivia decided to use the mechanisms of peaceful solution of international controversies, which never can be considered an unfriendly act' (23/03/2013).

From March 2011 onwards, Morales focused on addressing the historical roots of the dispute, depicting the Pacific war as driven by the oligarchy and foreign interests (anti-elitism) and emphasizing its dire economic consequences for the Bolivian people. Interestingly, however, Morales highlighted a national consensus on the matter, and his speeches not only included appeals to social movements and social organizations but also to political elites associated with the opposition. For instance, Morales started his speech celebrating the ICJ ruling of 2015 by thanking three ex-presidents who took part in the international campaign but were not sympathetic to the MAS: 'Brothers Álvaro García Linera, our vice-president, brothers ex-presidents Jorge Quiroga, Carlos Mesa, Jaime Paz Zamora, to General Guido Vildoso: many thanks for being together with the Bolivian people in such an important day for the Bolivians' (24/09/2015). This statement is all the more remarkable as Morales at other occasions had heavily criticized the very three ex-presidents who collaborated with him on the maritime cause. In 2003, for instance, he had called Paz Zamora (along with Sánchez de Lozada) a representative of 'the political mafia that lived off the people and implemented the current economic model that only increased poverty in the country' (ANF 1/6/2003), and he had accused ex-president Mesa of personally benefitting from the State's black budget when he was president (2003-2005), and of being subservient to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Morales 2018).

From early 2016 onwards, however, positive references to the opposition disappeared, and Morales attributed successes in the maritime dispute only to the 'people', mainly identified with social movements:

> 'People of Bolivia, the accomplishments reached so far would not had been concretized if we Bolivians would not had remained united, cohesive around our maritime claim, and for that reason, I take this opportunity to thank the whole Bolivian people, to our social movements for their unconditional support to the legal actions carried through the national government, for maintaining the sacred interests of the motherland' (Morales 2016-03-23).

Between the two quoted segments, an internal dispute had changed Bolivia's political landscape. The MAS majority of the Congress had convoked a referendum to change the constitution to add an additional presidential mandate so that President Morales and vice-president Álvaro García Linera would be able to participate in the next presidential election for a fourth consecutive mandate. Ex-presidents Quiroga, Paz Zamora, and Mesa positioned themselves against such changes. While national unity was a focus of Morales's discourse at least until 2016, critiques of Chile were common during the entirety of Period 2.

The peak of popular and organized mobilization for the maritime cause was probably the banderazo of March 10, 2018, in which the government mobilized enough people to hold a 200-kilometer blue flag along one of the main roads in the country to show support for the maritime demand (BBC Mundo 2018). During this phase, Morales also often highlighted the problems of Bolivia derived from its landlocked situation and accused Chile of acting in bad faith. Still, he reiterated that international justice was a peaceful means of solving controversies and appealed to bilateral dialogue, which was the desired result of the proceedings before the ICJ.

Finally, **Period 3** was the time of the legal defeat of Bolivia. In the speeches analyzed, President Morales kept appealing to bilateral dialogue based on Paragraph 176 of the ICJ rule (International Court of Justice 2018) and expressed trust in a historical solution, meaning that the Bolivian people would keep trying to find a sovereign exit to the Pacific Ocean for as long as Bolivia exists. He also returned towards recognizing the merits of national consensus, including the former presidents and the legal team who worked on the topic.

Conclusion

Our analyses of Bolivia's relations with the US and Chile exhibit clear traits of populist mobilization, involving references to people-centrism, anti-elitism, and linking domestic elites with foreign adversaries. The changes in such discourse were at least partially correlated with domestic political developments. In particular, we found a link between a more hostile, anti-elitist and, indeed, populist discourse and more volatile domestic politics. In other words, the more the Morales government was under pressure domestically (i.e., around 2008 and 2016, respectively), the more it framed its most conflictive foreign relationship – with the US – in populist terms, amongst others by way of linking domestic opposition to foreign adversaries. Our case study therefore exposes the link between foreign and domestic policy, which we presumed to be a characteristic feature of populism in power. However, this type of populist mobilization was clearly less pronounced during the period of relative domestic political stability, from 2010 to 2015. Relations with Chile, by contrast, expose a more ambiguous picture as the link between domestic instability and populist mobilization is less obvious. To make sense of this discrepancy, the analysis

of anti-imperialist, populist elements in Hugo Chávez' addresses by Sagarzazu and Thies (2019) proves to be helpful. In Venezuela, Chávez resorted to anti-imperialism and an antagonistic approach towards the US especially when the oil price was high, i.e., when Chávez felt most secure domestically and powerful externally – and not so much as a diversionary tool in times of domestic weakness. This might be related to the fact that, for Chávez, anti-imperialist rhetoric was not only targeted at a domestic audience, but also clearly at a regional one. In strong phases, Chávez resorted to more confrontational populist rhetoric to bolster his regional leadership ambitions. Yet, Bolivia never had such ambitions. Even in times of domestic political stability, when the MAS held a two-third majority and the government had ample room for maneouver domestically – from 2010 to 2015 – adopting an anti-imperialist international leadership role, as Chávez did, was unrealistic for Morales.

In any case, the two bilateral relations in our study differ in important ways. Whereas Bolivia's dispute with Chile has had a long history with virtually all previous Bolivian governments seeking in one way or the other to change the status quo, relations with the US resulted in a new conflict. In fact, the US previously was amongst Bolivia's most important aid donors, its major arms supplier, and it maintained a plethora of agencies within the country with a long history of political influence, particularly over matters related to the US 'war on drugs'. However, it is important to acknowledge that the MAS' electoral success and its political support base called for a novel approach to Bolivia's coca policy irrespective of Morales' character as a populist leader. Thus, the MAS' very electoral success established the coca issue's political salience. Clearly, it would have been impossible for Morales to govern against the core interest of its coca growing support base, from which he himself had emerged as a political leader. In that sense, a fundamental disagreement with the US was to be expected. Moreover, given the power differential between the two countries and the importance of the war on drugs in US domestic politics, a consensual resolution that would have allowed Bolivia to change track without antagonizing the US was probably beyond reach in any case. Populist mobilization has been a driving force in the deterioration of relations with the US, nonetheless. Rather than challenging the US approach to fighting the drug trade through negotiations and consultation, Morales' discourse quickly – and perhaps unnecessarily – contributed to the escalation of bilateral tensions. It framed the dispute in term of both populism as a thin ideology and its accompanying thick ideology. Thus, he habitually described the US as a hostile empire, rather than a foreign nation with different interests, and as an actor secretively meddling in Bolivia's internal affairs, rather than as a negotiation partner. Expelling US diplomats and other agencies was a logical conclusion for Morales, after having conjured up threats to Bolivian sovereignty. Thus, rather than limiting the fallout of an unavoidable bilateral dispute (over drugs), Morales throughout the entire 14 years of his presidency in his discourse utilized the US as a threatening force against which the Bolivian people ought to unite. By repeatedly depicting his domestic opponents as US puppets, he narrowed the scope for compromise further.

The dispute with Chile is somewhat more complex. In his initial years as President, Morales invested political capital in a bilateral dialogue that also benefited from affinities in terms of thick ideology between his government and that of Bachelet in Chile. Throughout this time, his discourse did not visibly seek to increase the salience of the issue to his support base and the wider public. However, given its long history, the matter naturally carried a certain political salience and publicity. Moreover, having been elected as a nationalist leader, Morales would have found it difficult to abandon his country's maritime claims entirely; yet, unlike in the US case, the resonance of the dispute with Chile with the MAS' thick ideology as well as populism as a thin ideology were indirect at best and less easy to establish discursively. Thus, employing this particular dispute for populist mobilization appeared less promising as compared to relations with the US. Morales' relatively benign discourse during the period up to 2010 seems to support this. Interestingly, in a clear departure from his otherwise very negative portrayal of Bolivia's past political elites, Morales also actively involved – and publicly praised – several previous presidents in the process. In any case, a combination of factors then accompanied the change in policy on Bolivia's part: with the billionaire businessman Sebastián Piñera, a less ideologically sympathetic figure became president in Chile in 2010. All the while the bilateral dialogue had not yielded any substantial progress. While not necessarily an escalation of the dispute, referring the issue to the ICJ was both a change in tactic and a visible break with past precedents that opened the space for novel ways of mobilization. Once Morales announced his government's intention to refer the issue to an international court in 2011, he began employing a significantly more hostile language vis-à-vis Chile. Notably, the change in language did not coincide with a particularly strong domestic political opposition to the MAS. Nonetheless, the new language made use of populist tropes by describing the original loss of access to the sea as the result of oligarchic business interests against the Bolivian peoples' sovereign rights – with resonance until today. Yet, we did not find evidence that populist mobilization required Morales to adopt more conflictive policies. Instead, mobilization in the case of Chile – most visible in the banderazo of 2018 – is best understood as a response to domestic challenges with limited repercussions for foreign policy. Morales' return to appeals to bilateral dialogue with Chile following the ICJ's final ruling supports this further.

In sum then, our case study reveals a close relationship between domestic and foreign policy under populist governments. In particular, it suggests that potentially conflictive foreign relationships can play an important role in mobilization when domestic political challenges arise, as suggested by theories of diversion. This is to say that populists pick and choose foreign disputes according to their potential merit for domestic political gains. Thus, the character and political context of each conflict matters. However, the variation across the two bilateral relations also underlines what other studies on the nexus of populism and foreign policy in Latin America have found: 'populism as thin-centred ideology gains meaning in foreign policy when it is analysed along with its thick companion ideology' (Wehner and Thies 2020, 239). The initial years of the Morales presidency show that, under certain circumstances,

populism does not preclude genuine dialogue even if domestic pressure is high. Instead, ideological sympathy towards the Bachelet government and – perhaps – the enticing prospect of successful negotiations go a a long way in explaining Morales' promotion of dialogue with Chile. By contrast, where thick ideologies clash and such clashes translate easily into the populist repertoire of anti-elitism and people-centrism, as it was the case with the US, an escalation beyond the precise conflict of interest is likely. This is noteworthy as structural impediments continued to hamper Bolivia's capacity to act internationally and the deterioriation of relations with the US made matters worse. However, we also acknowledge that worsening relations with the US were accompanied by ever closer alignment with the Bolivarian camp led by Chávez in Venezuela. For instance, during Morales first years as President and for as long as oil revenues were up, concessional loans from Venezuela (and Brazil) replaced aid from the US (Cruz Prego 2022). Thus, the loss of one partner meant winning another – and one that was ideologically more aligned.

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