Evaluating Evo Morales: The Conflicts and Convergences of Populism, Resource Nationalism, and Ethno-Environmentalism in Bolivia

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Abstract
This thesis seeks to integrate existing scholarly frameworks of populism, resource nationalism, and ethno-environmentalism in order to create a comprehensive understanding of Morales and the MAS. From 2006 until 2019, President Evo Morales and the \textit{Movimiento al socialismo} (MAS) led Bolivia to global prominence. Experts lauded Morales and the MAS for apparent development successes and democratic expansion in a nation long known for its chronic poverty and conflict. Still, by the time of his controversial resignation, several socioenvironmental conflicts had diminished his reputation as an ethno-environmental champion, revealing the tensions inherent in pursuing resource nationalist development in an ethnopolitist state. While existing scholarship on the subject views populist and resource nationalist strategies and policies separately, their functional convergence in the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) conflict demonstrates the necessity of an integrated framework. An integrative examination of the TIPNIS conflict reveals that the MAS prioritization of modernist development above all else. The Bolivian case provides a unique avenue for insight into progressive populism and ethno-environmental governance across Latin American politics, where commitments to aggressive visions of developmentalism characterize parties and political actors across the political spectrum.

Keywords
Bolivia, Evo Morales, populism, resource nationalism, indigenous, comparative politics, Deborah Harrold, Political Science, Social Sciences

Disciplines
Comparative Politics

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Abstract

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Introduction

Just five years after performing a sacred Aymara indigenous ritual at Tiwanaku ahead of his inauguration, Bolivian president Evo Morales announced plans to build a highway directly through a legally protected indigenous territory of great spiritual importance. First designated as a natural reserve in 1965, then as an autonomous indigenous territory since 1990, the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) in the Amazon Basin of Bolivia contains four distinct ecosystems and is home to multiple indigenous communities that Morales’ party has increasingly addressed. In 2011, the government, led by Evo Morales, announced plans to build the Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos highway through the TIPNIS, a controversial act that angered many grassroots indigenous constituent groups that first brought Morales and his party, the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) to power. The proposed project would extend infrastructure to parts of the Amazon that were previously inaccessible to commercial development. An ethnic and environmental haven, the TIPNIS has become a site of ongoing territorial conflict in Bolivia, highlighting the tensions of progressive politics of inclusion and a commitment to rapid development in a country that has long sought to balance modernization with traditional indigeneity and environmental respect. Still, Morales’ actions cannot be entirely attributed to a case of democratic backsliding. Several fundamental contradictions underlay his presidency, yet he retained significant support from indigenous populations and the general public throughout his tenure. Morales’ inconsistencies can be best explained by examining the interplay between his populism, resource nationalism, and ethno-environmentalism. The Bolivian leader tries to make these three elements compatible through different linkages and negotiations with civil society and the private sector. However, a range of socioenvironmental conflicts mar his presidency and clarifies the incompatibility of this governing proposition.
Morales pursues a vision of modernist development, thus relegating all other commitments to secondary status.

The Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) came to power with Evo Morales as president in 2006 as part of the Latin American turn to the left following the region’s neoliberal period. A progressive regime, the party has redefined relationships and linkages between party, state, and social movements. While the general populist expectation is the construction of a unitary, exclusive people, the MAS opts for inclusivity to build a broader social base. With Evo Morales at the forefront, both the party and president himself have been classified as both an inspiration for developing countries worldwide seeking to resist United States hegemony and a socialist enemy who seeks to expel all foreign influence. Although traditional socialists focus on domestic economic elites, Morales frequently shifts attention to the international arena to foster domestic unity. Leftists see him as a progressive victor with the implementation of numerous redistributive social programs, while conservatives see him as a radical leftist with an unsustainable economic plan. Some see an indigenous hero willing to mobilize a long-marginalized majority population; others see a leader with political ambition willing to perform indigenous rituals when convenient for his political agenda. The broad spectrum of characterizations indicates scholarly disagreement as to the true nature of Evo’s presidency and the MAS’s political strategy. These varying portraits all have some basis in reality; his presidency has been full of core contradictions. How can one pursue an extractivist model of development while promoting indigenous rights? Understanding how these seemingly conflicting elements play out functionally is a primary goal of this thesis.

There is no Evo without populism, without resource nationalism, without his indigeneity. To treat any one concept in isolation is to ignore the true complexities of Bolivian politics. I
propose an integration of these frameworks to create a comprehensive picture of Morales. Despite scholarly assessments, functionally, Morales subverts definition by using a combination of populist, environmentalist, and nationalist elements throughout his presidency that has kept the party in power for nearly fifteen years. His regime oversaw the amplification of indigenous voices, a redistributive welfare program, ensured environmental health for marginalized groups, and economic growth, including a sizeable increase in GDP per capita. Despite electoral controversies in 2019 leading to the end of Evo’s tenure, these elements sustain the political project beyond his individual presidency. By offering a new evaluative framework for understanding Evo Morales, I demonstrate how the Bolivian case provides a unique avenue for insight into progressive populism and ethno-environmental governance in Latin American politics.

This thesis proceeds with necessary contextualization, first charting the origins of the MAS and explaining the Bolivian population’s demographic and geographic dynamics. I also explain extractive development, highlighting how National Development Plans have attempted to combine ethno-environmentalism and economic growth. Following this introductory section, I provide a literature review of relevant scholarship that informs this project. I then introduce the three dimensions upon which I evaluate Evo Morales and analyze the ways in which these areas merge functionally during the TIPNIS conflict. I provide a thorough account of competing interests throughout the conflict and use a conjunctural analysis to highlight specific instances when actors’ interests converge and diverge. By examining the MAS's interests and then indigenous interests in parallel chronological order, I find a willingness of the party to prioritize modernist development over all else. I conclude the thesis by presenting the current state of affairs in Bolivia, and aim to demonstrate the broader generalizability of this project.
Origins of the MAS

The Bolivian case requires rich contextualization due to its unique demographic composition and the continuing impacts of colonialism. The MAS’s history highlights how themes of dispossession have affected the nation for centuries. Evo Morales’ own biography is inextricably combined with the party’s rise. Born in 1959, Morales grew up in the Chapare region, known best for coca-growing, to a family of Aymara indigenous descent. While indigenous peoples have grown coca for thousands of years, the crop became the target of the United States Drug Enforcement Agency across Latin America during the 1980s due to its use in cocaine production. Law 1008 of 1988 in Bolivia sought to outlaw the crop and impose harsh punishments on any illegal cultivation (Anria 2018, 70). Coca farmers in the Chapare, including Evo Morales, first organized to resist coca eradication and US imperialism more broadly. The MAS grew out of the same organizing bloc in the 1990s, meant to be a political instrument of the masses, including indigenous farmers and the working class more broadly. Cocalero, or coca-growing organizers supported the idea of self-representation and desired political recognition (Anria 2018, 72). Still, the MAS was not the first mass-mobilizing party in the nation. In 1952, the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) came to power, led by middle class reformists wanting to break free from oligarchic control and to organize workers and peasants (Crabtree 2013, 272). As an early predecessor to the resource nationalism of the MAS, the MNR nationalized the tin industry, established universal suffrage, and took on a limited land reform. Overall, the party provided new channels of representation, yet failed to integrate labor or campesinos into politics.

In the 1990s, the MNR came to power once more, headed by Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. Lozada undertook a series of reforms meant to encourage the mobilization of Bolivian
politics and encourage a celebration of multiculturalism. In line with the rest of Latin America, Bolivia embraced neoliberalization and privatization. New, private ownership closed many state-owned mines. Many unemployed miners migrated to the Chapare region, where they too began working as coca farmers and organizing with the cocalero unions. Neoliberal reforms created winners and losers, and strong feelings of collective loss. The working class bore the biggest impact, and many indigenous groups also lost access and power over newly privatized land. However, some previously excluded groups benefited from decentralization reforms which allowed them to participate in local elections. The 1994 Law of Popular Participation opened up local politics to citizen organizations and added a dimension of territoriality to civil society by creating municipalities (Anria 2018, 71). This avenue for increased participation meant rural actors, including indigenous peoples, were incorporated into national politics. Within this context, Evo Morales and the MAS began politically organizing under various indigenous and cocalero coalitions – not yet the movement-based party known today. Rather than organize around a broad array of social and economic grievances, the MAS in the 1990s focused singularly on local coca growers’ rights.

Bolivia faced a crisis of representation at the turn of the millennium. Parties who specifically promised an end to market-oriented reforms continued neoliberalization policies, leading to a mass loss of trust. The MAS took on an opposition stance, growing into a party concerned with more than coca growing. In the 2000 “Water War,” Morales took on a role of framing the proposed privatization of water collection and delivery in rural and urban areas around indigenous issues and sovereignty. (Kohl & Farthing 2012, 229) As a hybrid of movement and party networks, the MAS draws its strength from connections to grassroots social movements, such as peasant syndicates and indigenous governing coalitions. From its earliest
days, the MAS rejected the party label, preferring to call itself an Instrumento Político instead. Movement-based parties are loosely organized, decentralized, and grassroots-based. The MAS grew from a one-issue party to including a broad discourse with themes of improving everyday living standards, anti-imperialism, land reform, nationalism, and reasserting sovereignty over natural resources.

Although originating from rural areas, the MAS needed to build urban alliances to build a politically relevant coalition. A key feature of the MAS is its pragmatism and inclusive nature. Its rural coalition is rooted in the cocaleros of the Chapare, but also includes three campesino groups: The Unique Confederation of Rural Laborers of Bolivia (CSUTCB), the Syndicalist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia (CSCIB), and the Bartolina Sisa National Confederation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Native Women of Bolivia (CNMCIOB-BS). While campesino loosely translates to peasant, the identity is primarily that of the rural working class. To gain national relevance, the MAS linked with urban-popular organizations, particularly in La Paz and El Alto, which together create the largest metropolitan area in Bolivia. This linkage marked one of the first examples of a political party’s territorial fluidity. The MAS was no longer a strictly rural or indigenous party as its appeals to urban groups based on nationalization and redistribution were now substantive and broad.

The demographic landscape

Bolivia’s unique characteristics as a landlocked nation with immense natural resource wealth and complex demography renders many generalizations made by comparativists problematic. Indigeneity impacts Bolivian politics in ways unlike most other countries. With a GDP per capita of $3,552.07 in 2019 and a population of just over 10 million, Bolivia is the poorest nation in South America, and also one of the smallest (World Bank 2019). Over 60
percent of Bolivians have an indigenous background — more than any other Latin American state — putting these issues at the center of Bolivian political life (see Figure 1). Moreover, a geographic split between highland and lowland areas further fragments the population.

**Figure 1.** Percent indigenous population of Latin American countries. ECLAC 2012.

62.2% of Bolivians identify in some way as indigenous, primarily as Aymara and Quechua, each with over 1.5 million citizens having declared belonging in the 2012 Census. Beyond these majority indigenous nations, electoral laws identify 43 minority nations that exist...
within Bolivia’s borders, including Afro-Bolivians and the Chiquitano and Guaraní tribes (see Figure 2). Defining indigeneity is difficult worldwide due to historical marginalization of these communities. Many people are reluctant to accept external definitions. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recommends that self-identification constitute the primary basis of identification. Figure 2 demonstrates the importance of self-identification, as in the 2012 Census people identified themselves as many different tribes, yet also had options of “originario,” “intercultural,” “campesino,” “indígena,” or “indígena u originario no especificado.”

Furthermore, six tribes labeled as official minority nations or peoples have less than 200 identifying members, with the Uru-ito tribe having just two respondents claim membership. Even as officially recognized groups, many indigenous tribes face rapidly dwindling numbers, threatening their very existence. Such a small membership means citizens must boldly assert their identities and mobilize for policies that protect their livelihoods.
Figure 2. Population of Bolivia declaring membership in one of the Naciones y Pueblos Indígena Originario Campesinos (Indigenous Peoples). 2012 Census, INE.

Closely related to indigenous identity is mestizaje, or interraciality. Many Bolivians opt for this label due to historical discrimination against their indigenous identities. In the 1952 Revolution, the MNR government pushed assimilation and applied homogeneous labels to all indigenous peoples. Still, indigeneity in Bolivia is more than ethnic descent. It is based on language, customs, and alternative ontologies. Many Bolivians learn multiple languages in their childhood. Non-exclusively, 68.7% of Bolivians learned Spanish as a child, 18% learned Quechua, 11.1% learned Aymara, 0.6% learned Guaraní (INE 2012, 31). The state’s official languages include Spanish as well as all indigenous languages for the official majority and minority tribes shown in Figure 1. Nearly 20% of the population learned Spanish as a second language, indicating
indigenous identity may be prioritized over Bolivian/Spanish nationalism at times. Language fluidity is a hallmark of Bolivian society, something the MAS eventually capitalizes on.

![Image of Bolivia's topography]

**Figure 3. Physical map of Bolivia.**

**Figure 4. Indigenous population by municipality.**

There are two relevant geographic dichotomies characterizing the Bolivian population that add layers to the existing complexities: the urban/rural and lowland/highland divides. Bolivian topography can be split into three discrete regions: the altiplano in the west, shown in Figure 3, the llanos and yungas hybrid topography, and the lowlands in the east. The altiplano, a high and wide plateau, along with the llanos is home to most of Bolivia’s indigenous population and is known as the tierras altas, or highlands (see Figure 4). People of Aymara and Quechua descent populate this area primarily. The eastern lowlands consist of parts of Cochabamba and the Beni, Pando, and Santa Cruz departments. While most indigenous peoples reside in the highlands, Bolivia’s largest city of Santa Cruz, with over a million residents, is situated in the lowlands. In 2012, 67.5% of Bolivians were urban residents, and 32.5% lived in rural areas (INE 2012, 14). These divides are politically relevant: they dictate many of Bolivia’s governing and
organizing coalitions, contributing to the fragmented nature of governance in the country. By establishing key ties with constituents across the territorial spectrum, the MAS was able to earn broad support outside of their region of origin.

**Extractivist model of development**

The MAS uses an extractive developmentalist model to spur economic growth and finance its redistributive actions. Extractivism, or an economy dependent on the extraction of natural resources, has existed for centuries in Bolivia, from the exploitation of silver-rich Potosí by the Spaniards in the 1530s through to the present (Klein 2011, 29). Natural resource extraction intensified in the 21st century in terms of scale, number of actors, activities, locations, and the extent of the ensuing ecological crisis (Svampa 2019a, 2). This new era, known as neoextractivism, accompanies a productivist vision of development in Bolivia that privileges growth above all. The MAS’s rise to power occurred at the same time as commodity prices soared across Latin America and resource nationalism promised to convey returns to the nation. When global commodity prices dropped in 2013, neoextraction only intensified further, leading to a renewed focus on the export of primary goods, with countries like Bolivia further committing to mining their natural wealth. As state spending was tied to extraction, the loss of revenue pushed state efforts further. Neoextractivism and low prices introduce a number of socioenvironmental struggles not only in Bolivia but across the continent, as large-scale mining and monoculture production require large swaths of land and are capital- and technology-intensive yet generate few jobs. Fourteen mega-dams have been built in the last decade, yet extractive industries were not the only sector of the economy where socioenvironmental struggles opened up. Land-grabbing has increased to the point that 66 percent of farmland is held by one percent of landowners (Svampa 2019b, 9). Extractivist projects tend to occur in rural
areas frequently occupied by indigenous and campesino communities, like the TIPNIS, and tend to cause severe environmental degradation.

Once in power, the MAS made major efforts to change state-market relationships and to reject the neoliberalization of the prior era. In Bolivia, the MAS adopted a state-led extractive development model. By instituting a number of National Development Plans, the party attempted to balance concerns over development with concerns for the protection of Bolivia’s natural resources. The first Development Plan (PND) in 2006 set out the themes that would continue to characterize the MAS for years, namely a transformation of economic ideology away from neoliberalism and the incorporation of Vivir Bien, or the idea of ‘living well,’ in a sustainable manner that embraces indigenous practices. The plan consists of four national strategies: Bolivia Digna, Bolivia Soberana, Bolivia Productiva, and Bolivia Democrática para Vivir Bien. Bolivia Digna, or Dignified Bolivia, focuses on the eradication of poverty and inequality. The pillar of Soberana (sovereignty) connects development to foreign policy, namely promoting resource nationalism and self-determination in the international system. Bolivia Productiva aims to diversify the Bolivian economy, through generating a budgetary surplus and boosting incomes. Lastly, Bolivia Democrática is concerned with government management and transparency.

The PND can largely be read as an ideological doctrine rather than a concrete policy recommendation. Much of its discourse revolves around a profound rejection of the prior neoliberal era, deeming it colonialism. The plan’s introduction describes how inequality and social discrimination were exacerbated by reliance on markets rather than the state for allocation of resources. Gaps between planned revenue and commodity prices in the neoliberal era were solved by NGO and foreign aid. The PND describes these actions as interventions aiming to subject Bolivia to foreign interests. It describes neoliberal failures and subsequent “aid” as “a
system of ethnic, cultural, and political domination, steeped in racism, and rooted in various forms of colonialism” (Ministerio de Planificación de Desarrollo 2006, 12). The PND proposes a return to state intervention in order to recover lost sovereignty and to provide redistributive welfare to the people. The MAS’s populist constructions of elites frequently reference neocolonial experiences, particularly villainizing multinationals. The party blames foreign companies for grave economic hardships and embeds this resentment into development plans.

From environmental health worries over chemical crop eradication to anger at mine privatization in the neoliberal era, the MAS has been attentive to the importance of the environment in governance. A key part of its progressive discourse has been resource nationalism, or the desire to retain sovereignty over the natural resources of a state (Kohl & Farthing 2012, 229). It involves the attribution of economic woes to foreign or imperialist exploitation. Evo Morales’ rhetoric and the MAS’s development plans center around this sentiment. Moreover, they identify connections between indigeneity and development, claiming that the only way to truly decolonize is through state-led development (Postero 2017, 17). Conflicts over natural resource ownership continue to define Bolivian politics, whether it be the ousting of the US Agency for International Development or the nationalization of the hydrocarbon industry. However, the TIPNIS conflict presents a case in which the government attempts to grab land from the very population resource nationalist ideology prioritizes. Morales and the MAS frequently own claims to indigeneity when indigenous populations attempt to counter the party’s decision-making.

**Literature Review**

Existing scholarship on Bolivian political dynamics tends to be confined to either a study of the state, relegating society to silence, or a study of society, as if there were no state. While
the literature spans a number of academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, each account remains limited to one field. Due to the nature of the Bolivian case and its unique demographic and historical structures, I find it necessary to understand subjects like party structure together with social and environmental dynamics. Segregation in the literature creates generalizations about Morales and the MAS which cannot adequately address decision-making. In some dimensions, the MAS has created important ideological discourse, earning its title as a model nation for leftism in the region. At other times, research on environmental damage misses a discussion of the wider redistributive measures funded by the destruction and the support for these policies that exists beyond a modernizing elite or multinational firm. The following texts serve to ground this thesis, yet I hope to move beyond narrowed frameworks to show the intersectional nature of multiple policy commitments. I assess the literature based on the dimensions I set out in the next section: concern with the state, concern with resource nationalism, and concern with the environment and indigeneity.

In *The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Latin America*, Raúl Madrid (2012) combines scholarship on ethnic parties and populist parties, moving away from traditional populist definitions offered by Weyland (2001) or de la Torre (2013) who argue a hallmark of populism is the homogeneity of ‘the people.’ Instead, he argues that ethnic party inclusivity as opposed to exclusivity leads to success in Bolivia, and Latin America as a whole. Through individual-level survey data and statistical analysis, he proves that the MAS’s electoral success was due to a strategy that would speak to all facets of the population, regardless of geographical location or ethnic group. According to his findings, the MAS creates homogeneity in rhetoric. Madrid’s research successfully expands the definition of populism, something I find essential for the Bolivian case. At the same time, his treatment of indigeneity in electoral appeal lacks depth. He
does not provide examples of Evo Morales connecting with indigenous culture in terms of garments and language, both things that allow populist figures to reach their base. Moreover, Madrid does not elaborate on any policy commitments promised or provided to indigenous peoples. The book thoroughly explains the MAS’s connections to indigenous political organizations, but leaves out an account for how it reached people on an individual level.

Crabtree (2013) asks to what extent Morales and the MAS can be usefully described as populist in his chapter of *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*. To answer this question, he uses a historical-comparative method, comparing the MAS to the previous revolutionary government of 1952 (the MNR) as well as the neoliberal period post-1985. By looking at the populist features of those time periods in comparison to that of the MAS, Crabtree shows how the MAS does utilize traditionally populist elements. He claims effective characterization depends on one's theoretical definition, particularly if they subscribe to a Laclauian view of populism. According to Laclau, populism is a way of articulating politics that emerges when the existing political system cannot meet a specific set of social demands, such as incorporation of the working classes. He argues that the key consequence of the MAS’s reign is not necessarily its populism, but the way it redefined relationships and linkages between party, state, and social movements. I reject his claim that populism is constrained by social movements, a view that likely stems from an exclusive definition of populism in which the constructed people must have a unitary background and vantage point. Moreover, Crabtree devotes time to consider whether Morales should be seen as simply part of a communitarian tradition rather than as a subversive force in politics. Overall, he demonstrates how Morales and the MAS transformed the political makeup of Bolivia in ways that cannot be understated.
Anria (2018) explains exactly why social movements are so vital to populist success in Bolivia in his book *When Movements Become Parties*. Achieving and maintaining grassroots participation after assuming power has been elusive for political parties in Latin America, but the MAS has generally succeeded. He finds that movement-based parties have key attributes such as a grassroots social base and internally democratic structure that allow them to defy traditional oligarchization in governance. Interestingly, parties with high degrees of internal democratization often then pursue redistributive policies. While this text provides a key understanding of the MAS’s rise to power and the dynamics underlying its original victory, it fails to include how indigenous groups specifically are included or not in the internal workings of the MAS as time progresses.

Rather than discuss the workings of the state, some scholars focus on the contradictions that exist within the party’s resource nationalist framework. Resource nationalism is a policy and discourse formed around grievance politics, something closely related to ethnopopulism, yet rarely is a direct connection made between the two concepts. Kohl and Farthing (2012) highlight the realities of extractive-dependent economies, arguing that resource nationalism within such a development model not only limits government policy options but continues to fuel social protest. Structures created by extractive economics constrain decision-makers, that is, extractive economics generate environmental destruction and subsequent protests, yet also fund crucial social welfare programs. They contemplate the importance of the “stolen coastline” to Bolivia, an outcome of the War of the Pacific in the 19th century and how that loss has spurred a sense of collective injury which in turn contributes to building resource nationalist frames. Closely related, yet not mentioned by the authors is the connection between collective injury or loss and populist appeals. Following their logic, using grievance politics opens up criticisms of
extractivism as a whole. Laing (2020) also finds that resource nationalism supersedes indigenous ontologies, despite the fact that the MAS’s electoral appeal was due to the ability to connect this type of nationalism to indigenous self-determination. Through an ethnographic account of the TIPNIS conflict, she found that indigenous protestors altered their demands as the state took on a more restrictive stance. She unpacks the contradictions that exist between the MAS’s intent to give recognition to indigenous groups through the creation of a plurinational state and their neoextractivist model of development. Her article provides relevant analysis of state-indigenous conflict, yet again misses a prime opportunity to criticize or acknowledge the role of populism.

Understanding resource nationalism in a different way, in *Governing Extractive Industries*, Bebbington et. al. (2018) use a political settlement lens to demonstrate the ways in which natural resources have been used as a stake in coalition building and political negotiations. A political settlement is a balance of power in governance among differing social groups. Political settlements change when national or subnational actors materialize to challenge the status quo. Indigenous movements would constitute such actors, and the ways in which natural resource industries are governed is a function of the political settlement. This lens of analysis prioritizes power dynamics rather than institutions, making it a compelling model for understanding Bolivia, where institutions have been volatile in the past decades. Still, the authors contend that since 2006 there has been a stable political settlement. With widespread socioenvironmental conflict and coalitions crumbling, let alone a major election controversy in 2019, the MAS’s reign particularly since Morales’ third term beginning in 2012 can hardly be classified as ‘stable.’ Resource nationalist narratives often lack the connection between development and indigeneity that even the government makes.
Writing primarily on environmental politics, Argentinian sociologist Maristella Svampa argues that the consolidation of progressive political hegemony in Latin America is intimately linked to the commodity boom and neoextractivism. Neoextractivism creates a number of socioenvironmental struggles. Using qualitative evidence from across the region, Svampa (2019) shows how the Morales government has used political manipulation to argue against indigenous and environmental opposition to infrastructure projects like the Villa Tunari - San Ignacio de Moxos Highway. Her concept of the “ecoterritorial turn,” or the convergence of indigenous and environmental discourse during the 2000s and construction of collective action frames provides key theoretical basis to this thesis. The ecoterritorial turn is significantly connected to ideas of integrative environmental justice. While her research is primarily theoretical, it leaves out a discussion of the necessity of redistribution in Bolivia and an analysis of its benefits. She assumes the private sector is incompatible with true economic growth, despite the contributions of redistribution and small farming and business activities to the alleviation of poverty in the country. Such a strictly Marxist perspective limits the applicability of her argument. Although the harms of extractivism with extensive focus on mega infrastructure projects are clear, Svampa only loosely connects this to other policy and reasoning.

In her book *The Indigenous State*, Nancy Postero (2017) provides a more integrative framework for evaluating Evo Morales. She emphasizes the importance of his decolonizing attitude and the revision of laws and the constitution to have an environmental tilt. Her argument is one of the most balanced, asserting that Morales has been able to partially fulfill promises yet his extractive model permanently limits growth. There is a continued reliance on market capitalism which means many of the neoliberal relationships he sought to dismantle have not changed in practice. Still, she finds that his discourse of “economic liberation” is not merely a
farce and is indeed supported by an emerging indigenous middle class. Her argument reveals disagreement in the literature as few are willing to admit such populist discourse has no real economic policy implications nor consequences beyond rhetoric.

Adding a strictly indigenous perspective to the field, Bolivian sociologist and feminist theorist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) criticizes common narratives of decolonization and brings an anarcho-indigenous lens to understanding not only Bolivian but Latin American politics as a whole. In her 2004 essay *Reclaiming the Nation*, she traces the convergence of different indigenous and social actors throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, identifying pivotal moments in political history such as the Katarista-Indianista reemergence in the 1970s which led to the founding of a national indigenous organization and several indigenous political parties, and the cocalero movement beginning in the 1980s. She correctly predicted multiple crises of the state, not just that of neoliberalism, and argued that the United States’ neocolonialism would bring a more forceful indigenous insurgency. Her 2012 article, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*, written around the time of the TIPNIS, argues that the MAS continues to view the indigenous population as a traditional minority rather than as a contemporary body with modern interests and needs. Similarly, Bolivian intellectual and former Presidential Representative to the Constituent Assembly Oscar Vega Camacho (2019) takes on a highly critical attitude towards Morales evolving from his original position as a member of the MAS, arguing that the party has become completely oligarchic rather than decolonized. Still, Morales frequently references the decolonization of the state. With their more limited scope, these scholars represent only the indigenous perspective in the overarching narrative, and do not represent the campesino or urban working populations.
A considerable section of the literature criticizes the MAS for its actions within the TIPNIS conflict. Fabricant and Postero (2015) use ethnographic research on the MAS, lowland indigenous peoples, and national indigenous unions to argue that one cannot understand TIPNIS without understanding lowland extractive industries and agricultural production. They emphasize a link to the legacy of colonization, finding that racialized patterns of oppression and exploitation have characterized the lowlands since Spanish rule. Interestingly, the MAS claims their actions in the TIPNIS protect lowland indigenous peoples and call upon the same environmental legislation being used to oppose the project. Key Bolivian legislation includes conservationist protections for the environment in the same documents that promote development. Certain indigenous actors emphasize the protections afforded by law, while the MAS stresses the freedoms laid out for development. The ethnography provides a detailed description of all actors’ reasoning in conflict and the ways traditional adversaries like indigenous groups and elites can unite over a common interest, such as retaining an area of great ethnic and environmental importance. While it supplies key evidence, Fabricant and Postero argue the MAS ignores essential factors like the impacts of racism and colonialism. That begs the question: does ethnopopulism account for such factors? Do such populist tactics merely exist alongside structural issues like racism, or are they actively shaped by them?

While many efforts have been put forth to study the themes of this thesis, few, if any, have synthesized the themes of populism, resource nationalism, and ethno-environmentalism in such a way that does not make assumptions about the nature of the MAS. Existing arguments range from highly critical to congratulatory, with most authors ultimately placing the MAS somewhere in the center of the political spectrum. They fail to articulate how populist governing tactics impact ethno-environment mobilization, and frequently refuse to acknowledge the
importance of redistribution. Those who examine populism and state governance in Latin America frequently ignore the actual harms of the current development model. Clearly, a more holistic framework is needed.

Methods

The primary goal of this thesis is to create an integrated framework for understanding Evo Morales and MAS. I find that massive social movements trying to enter politics all have populist tendencies, such as nationalist rhetoric, anti-establishment messaging, and redistributive platforms. The MAS is no exception. Once in power, do these parties’ populist tendencies expand or harm environmentalism, and thus indigeneity? How can ethnopopulism exist within an extractive model of development? Does indigeneity exist only symbolically in governance for the MAS? These core questions obviously require contextualization in both Bolivian politics and culture as well as in Latin American populism. While the literature has extensively criticized extractivism, studies of Bolivian populism fail to account for resource nationalism as populist discourse. Review of the evidence indicates a reactionary cycle of sorts existing between indigenous desires and demands and the goals and directions of the MAS. While the extractivist model has been the hegemonic discourse of the 21st century, the existence of strong environmentalist legal frameworks in Bolivia still indicates a willingness to value nature. I connect the themes of this research, namely populism, natural resource governance, indigenous politics, and development in order to create a new framework for understanding the MAS. Such research will provide a model that can be used comparatively.

To effectively study the issues at hand, I compare interests during a time where these issues play out simultaneously in order to examine their convergences and divergences. There are demonstrated correlations between specific actions and the expansion or harm of ethno-
environmentalism. The TIPNIS conflict serves as a well-known, multilayered conflict in recent Bolivian history that demonstrates the breakdown of many populist alliances for the MAS and the potential destruction of a major protected Indigenous area of the Bolivian Amazon ecosystem. While the central conflict revolves around the year 2011 when Evo Morales approved the initial BNDES loan, the events that conspired cannot be siloed to just that year. The conflict offers a case where indigenous demands are on equal footing and in opposition to those of the government and requires contextualization that will provide a holistic understanding of the logics involved. Existing scholarship has primarily examined the TIPNIS only as a point of critique for the MAS, rather than as a series of events that created new relationships and linkages for all facets of society and government.

I first follow the state as a principal actor in conflict, charting its interests and actions. While examining the data, I define events specifically in a legal sense, charting laws and state plans, as well as government actions. This includes but is not limited to: legislation on economic use of protected areas, extractive decrees, and economic strategy as it relates to areas in the TIPNIS like Beni and Cochabamba. Legal frameworks focusing on ethno-environmentalism such as the Earth Bills granting rights to nature and the 2009 Constitution centered around plurinationalism and indigenous rights provide key evidence as well. They reveal official policy pertaining to indigeneity and give an important point of comparison: how does the State act in principle? Since a core part of this thesis is also studying the particular qualities of populist movements as defined above, I include the official rhetoric via speeches by Evo Morales and key administrators of the MAS, primarily Vice President Alvaro García Linera, and examine whether rhetorical strategies changed as a result of the conflict in the TIPNIS. I seek to understand whether any alteration was temporary or continued after the conflict denouement. This analysis
includes contextualizing events from the previous neoliberal administrations, such as the Cochabamba Water War protests and response in 2000, but primarily revolves around 2006-2014 in order to focus on the TIPNIS.

A second section charts indigenous interests, again revolving around the 2011 conflict but encompassing key points of context. All events for this analysis again relate to the environment and indigenous groups themselves. This includes key instances of collective action, such as marches and demonstrations, as well as rhetoric of primary leaders, and voting patterns of major grassroots alliances. While I trace the evolution of the Unity Pact over the course of Evo Morales’ tenure, I focus on the groups concerned with the TIPNIS. The groups in question consist of the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Quillasuyu (CONAMAQ), a highland indigenous coalition, the lowland Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), and the Indigenous Council of the South, an organization of those living within the southern part of the TIPNIS. Indigenous communities of the TIPNIS, namely the Yucaré, Trinitario-Mojeño, and Chimane people, all have their own output and sentiments, but I focus on indigenous organizations’ official statements. I also include any instances where indigenous ontologies of Buen Vivir are recognized or emphasized with official statements and documents.

This comparative analysis is derived from the theory of Marshall Sahlins to specifically analyze the ‘structure of the conjuncture’ of overlapping events. As a political anthropologist, Sahlins’ work studies the causation of cultural change and developed his theory in order to merge both deterministic and structural accounts. In his 1985 work Islands of History, he found that humans have agency in enacting cultural change, as do underlying forces, or structures, which may be demographic, geographic, or political. Conjunctural analysis acknowledges both underlying structures that shape events as well as individual agency in decision-making. A
conjuncture is the convergence of all underlying forces in which each contributes to the event itself yet also contributes to the defining of other forces. Applied to my project, each point of overlap between interest groups has its own structure to be unpacked. At each conjunction, I examine power dynamics, resource ownership, demands, and responses of the various actors involved.

**Evaluative Dimensions**

Throughout his tenure, Evo Morales used distinct elements of populism, resource nationalism, and ethno-environmentalism to create and retain a powerful electoral base and achieve governing imperatives. The following section seeks to demonstrate how these aspects are not interchangeable, but concurrent and deeply help commitments which must be understood within a specific Latin American economic context. While each individual element provides a useful way to understand the Andean leader, the three strategies must be considered in conjunction to gain a holistic grasp on the Bolivian case. Populism and resource nationalism are inextricably connected due to their emotional appeals and ability to create a unifying narrative of sovereignty and respect. As Morales’ rule continued, ethno-environmentalism is discarded and subsumed by resource nationalism. Still, the themes of indigenous environmental discourse ground Morales’ original campaign and early years in office. This section provides an in-depth explanation of each strategy.

**Populism**

Populism is a historically salient aspect of Latin American politics. As a political strategy, style, and at times an ideology, defining populism has been a contentious debate around the world for decades. Focusing on Latin America, populist movements have manifested throughout the region since the 1940s. Morales’ classification as a populist has great importance
given his rise to power on a platform upheld by deep engagement from grassroots and civil society actors. Since 2005, the MAS has dominated Bolivian electoral politics, collecting over 50% of votes in three consecutive presidential elections (see Figure 5). After controversy in 2019 sent electoral results into question, the party earned 55.1% of votes even without a Morales candidacy. Before 2002, indigenous parties similar to the MAS were unable to reach political relevance, faring poorly in elections (Madrid 2012, 2). What set the MAS apart was its populist tendencies: antagonism towards elites, ethnic and emotional appeals, redistributive economics, and personalistic leadership. Radical populism was an essential part of the MAS’s initial victory and ascent to power. Most importantly, populism explains Morales’ willingness to make contradictory decisions while governing. Although an integral part of his leadership, the populism that brought the MAS to power became used for repression of indigenous populations during later conflict.

Figure 5. Percent of vote totals for the MAS in presidential elections
Scholars have categorized Latin American populism into three distinct stages: classical, neoliberal, and radical. The first wave of classical populism throughout the 1940s can be characterized by its redistribution and incorporation of previously disenfranchised groups, primarily the working classes (de la Torre 2017, 196). State-led development via import substitution industrialization captured the economies of many nations. When ISI policies failed to catalyze true economic growth, many countries faced a period of stagnation. Following the disappointments of ISI, the neoliberal populist wave took hold in the 1980s and 1990s, concerned with reversing the economic stagnation of the prior decades. Populism frequently emerges after crises of representation or of state legitimacy (Weyland 2001). Another crisis occurred across Latin America when neoliberal policy prescriptions failed to promote true economic growth (de la Torre 2017, 200). In the context of the region’s turn to the left, leaders like Evo Morales, Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, and Rafael Correa of Ecuador are labeled the “radical populists” of the 21st century (200). Radical populism uses constituent power as a revolutionary force, leading to a refounding of the state, as seen in Bolivia’s 2009 Constitution. As a whole, populism is the emergence of mass politics challenging an elite power. The populist constituency divides politics into two antagonistic and irreconcilable camps (de la Torre 2017, 195). In a Manichean duality, the populist camp (“the people”) are an inherently righteous group challenging evil, frequently manifested as oligarchic rule or foreign elites. Each manifestation then has its own particular qualities.

Evo Morales meets the traditional criteria for populism, placing him into a particular leadership category with infamous colleagues like Chávez and Perón. As a so-called radical populist, he used personal charisma to create majoritarian mobilization out of a diverse population. Populist electoral strategies frequently use one prominent personality both in ruling
and campaigning. That leader must be imagined as one of the masses, able to connect with the populace in a non-hierarchical manner. The MAS used populist electoral strategies, with Morales as the central strongman backed by a massive social base. Morales frequently emphasized his coca grower roots and experience in union organizing. Although the MAS began with bottom-up mobilization (in contrast to the expected top-down populist consolidation), the party eventually evolved into a top-down entity as the TIPNIS conflict developed. Another key populist quality exhibited by Morales and the MAS is their incorporation of lower classes and poorer areas. Using discourse about redistribution, Morales reincorporated the constituents first brought into politics by the MNR. As all populist leaders do, Morales used anti-establishment rhetoric and emphasized the party’s social movement roots in campaigns. He called on his unionist past to demonstrate his willingness to protest the ruling parties. Morales fixates not only on domestic political elites, but on who he deems to be imperialists in the country. He constructs the dangerous other as United States imperialism and foreign intervention more broadly. By construing an outside force as the other, Morales further expands his inclusivity to constitute the nation as all those within Bolivia’s border. In his first presidential election, Morales stated that “we will defend the national territory against all forms of North American penetration” (Madrid 2012, 67). His statist agenda appealed to people across the political spectrum, and his resource nationalist rhetoric garnered support from Bolivians on the right (Madrid 2012, 68). The final traditionally populist quality to note is Morales’ down-to-earth style. Populist candidates frequently rely on their humble origin stories to connect with the people. In this way, Morales is truly of the people. The president never attended college, nor did he finish high school. His genuine indigenous origins and work with the population allowed him to easily build trust in a nation where political distrust was high.
Morales’ populism also contains a multitude of unique attributes. In the pursuit of clarity, many scholars opt to create restrictive definitions for populism, frequently centering around the exclusivity of “the people.” Some experts believe populists must construct a unified, homogeneous people out of the citizenry, which is not the case for Bolivia. Morales emphasizes inclusivity in his campaigns, never speaking to just one demographic or geographic area. Although he is of Aymara indigenous descent, the indigeneity exhibited in his discourse exemplifies a broader understanding of tradition, rather than appealing to strictly Aymara people. John Crabtree (2013) also emphasizes Morales’ use of indigeneity and participatory principles. He describes communitarian traditions and a spirit of active participation adopted by the MAS. Although its accountability to its social base has diminished over time, Morales and the party have been surprisingly responsive to grassroots constituents (Crabtree 2013, 284). Instead of choosing technocrats for his cabinet, Morales chose leaders from his social base. Even when social groups were in opposition to each other, Morales constantly reaffirmed linkages to avoid widespread opposition (286).

While Morales and the MAS clearly demonstrate standard populist qualities, certain attributes like ethnicity play a larger role than some scholars contend. I adopt the term “ethnopopulism” from Raúl Madrid’s larger work The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Latin America, as the Bolivian case truly emphasizes traditional populism combined with ethnic appeals. An ethnopopulist party combines particular qualities of both instruments. According to Madrid, ethnic parties prioritize the interests of a specific ethnic group (6). Although they use similar tactics, populists can appeal to a group on a number of bases besides ethnicity. At the same time, ethnicity is a powerful identifier that when used in an inclusive manner can create a broad coalition for a given leader or candidate. The key to ethnopopulism is this appeal that articulates
inclusiveness. The MAS incorporated both indigenous and non-indigenous organizations into its alliance, centering its platform around general leftist ideas like state intervention and social welfare. Inclusivity succeeds more often than ethnic polarization campaigns, as social and ethnic identities can be constructed and deconstructed rather than rely on an inherent quality. In a society like Bolivia with fluid ethnicity, the MAS balances historical cleavages. Widespread mestizaje in the country helps soften identity boundaries and contributes to the party’s ability to unify a diverse public. Madrid argued that ethnopopulism succeeds when there are low levels of ethnic polarization, as exhibited in Bolivia (36).

The MAS uses a number of specifically ethnic appeals which are effective in Bolivia due to the country’s unique demographic makeup. Broad appeals come with a certain level of ambiguity that allows Morales to speak to all people and yet no specific group all at once. When convenient, the state may direct rhetoric to an undifferentiated people with the guarantee that it will resonate with at least one faction, whether or not it angers the rest. Different groups may interpret ethnic appeals differently. The MAS’s appeals to ethnicity range from emotional rhetoric to physical ceremony to tangible linkages between state and indigenous governments.

As a movement-based party, the MAS has close ties with indigenous organizations, particularly with Aymara coca grower unions in Cochabamba. After connecting the organization with his own indigenous roots, Morales reached out to the Quechua-speaking population as the second-largest ethnic majority in the nation (Madrid 2012, 53). Endorsement from large organizations like the Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB) and coordination among lowland organizing groups gave the MAS further legitimacy as it built popularity. The MAS also ran numerous indigenous candidates under its party umbrella for high-profile positions. With Evo Morales promoting his Aymara heritage, the MAS made sure to
include indigenous leaders in its political ranks. Beyond the lower local levels, the MAS frequently recruited candidates from the indigenous constituent communities and allowed local organizations to nominate the candidates on occasion (55).

Beyond political structure, ethnopopulism in Bolivia comes in the form of rhetoric and demands. Morales regularly uses symbolic appeals of indigeneity to signal his alliance with the people. In his speeches, he describes an ongoing struggle against colonialism and the defense of sovereignty and culture. Anti-colonial invocations hold particular weight for many indigenous-identifying people who have faced persecution, assimilation campaigns, and threats to existence by outside entities for hundreds of years. Moreover, rhetoric criticizing colonialism and imperialism directly implicates local elites, many of whom instituted foreign contracts or have a strictly Spanish heritage as opposed to mestizo or indigenous origins. Morales also articulates traditional indigenous demands, like defense of coca growing in the face of US eradication programs and includes broader social issues like education and security.

While the MAS carefully built a broad, indigenous-led coalition, signs existed from the start that it was more superficial than a genuine transformation. On the one hand, indigenous leaders are included as elected representatives within the party. On the other hand, Morales picks more candidates himself than those invited into the party. As shown in later sections, he performs sacred indigenous rituals while his development strategies desecrate protected indigenous territories. He encourages an active celebration of indigeneity, but when that identity is exercised in conflict against the state it is considered treasonous. Ethnopopulism masks core contradictions in governance, making it a key aspect of any framework for understanding Evo Morales.
Resource Nationalism

While ethnopopulism adequately explains rhetorical actions and voter mobilization, the actual policy commitments of the MAS must be considered. On May 1, 2006, also known as Workers’ Day, Evo Morales nationalized the hydrocarbons industry. Four years later to the day, the former president nationalized electricity firms in 2010. In his first inaugural address, Morales stated that “the new economic regime of Bolivia must be fundamentally based on natural resources” (Thomson et al. 2018, 63). These actions and attitudes indicate a larger discourse that permeates the Morales presidency and the MAS. Morales uses resource nationalist rhetoric and policy to capture popular sentiment and push forward an economic agenda based on state ownership and extraction of natural resources. While the state oil and gas company, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB) has existed since 1937 with the expropriation of the United States Standard Oil Company, the period of MNR rule transformed Bolivia into a net-exporter (“Historia de YPFB”). Still, different regimes encouraged foreign investment in the hydrocarbons industry, and by 1996 President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada broke YPFB into private firms run by foreign states. The firms only paid 18% royalties to the state. Morales revived the national hydrocarbons company and negotiated new contracts with international firms that gave the country more than 50% hydrocarbon royalties. As the assertion of state sovereignty over the natural resource wealth within a country’s borders, resource nationalism has many facets and realizations in Bolivia.

Resource nationalism emerges out of practice. It is part of a broader anti-colonial nationalism in many resource-rich states where control of resources by outside actors, usually parastatal themselves to the colonial power, create great mistrust over contracts. Bolivians have mobilized around this issue since the 1930s, but the grievances have existed since the Spanish
colonial rule that lasted from the 1530s until 1825 (Klein 2011, 98). The Spanish first organized and coerced Bolivian laborers into mining Potosí, a site of great mythological and spiritual importance. After the end of the official colonial era, resource ownership continued to be controlled by both white Spaniards living in the country, and outside entities principally originating in Spain. These companies targeted silver from the mining centers of Potosí and Oruro, and when silver dropped in value moved their sights to tin. Bolivians constituted the main labor source for these companies, yet did not retain the profits. They were subject to harsh conditions and received few concessions from the state. The War of the Chaco in the 1930s in which Bolivia made massive territorial concessions to Paraguay mobilized indigenous populations to counter the ruling classes. The spread of distrust towards the established political class eventually became the 1952 Revolution in which the MNR gained power and incorporated the middle classes with a platform based entirely on nationalism.

Definitionally, resource nationalism can be broken down into several different components, both political and economic. At its essence, resource nationalism implies both a resource aspect and nationalist/identity aspect. Natural resources are raw materials occurring in nature. They can be used for economic gain or consumption. Some scholars understand resources with a dialectical perspective, with resources only holding meaning in relation to their mode of production (Koch and Perreault 2019, 615). Although in this sense natural resources may be a constructed idea, I treat them as naturally occurring materials of immense value to the state. While control of natural resources is often a point of contention between states worldwide, resource nationalism distinctly connects resource governance to a social identity and assertion of a specific nation or nation-state (612). As nationalism emerges under specific social and economic conditions, resource nationalism commonly arises in commodity-exporting countries
where market volatility makes it vital for a nation to assert ownership over natural resources and ensure that citizens can survive economic recession. Resource nationalism becomes salient in such states because hydrocarbons, minerals, and other resources are of strategic importance (612). At the same time, leaders must find ways to create support for development strategies based on natural resources, as extraction is a historically fraught subject with enduring resentment and trauma from mistreatment of workers in the mining industry. To do so, leaders link resource extraction to identity politics.

Historian Benedict Anderson in his famed work discussed the construction of “imagined communities” as a basis for understanding nationalism. Nations are not defined by territory or political borders, rather they are imagined surrounding a given characteristic or characteristics (Anderson 2006). Following Anderson’s theory, nations may be based on geography, language, ethnicity, and more. They can be attached to a state, but frequently operate as subunits to the larger political body. The state may assume nationhood based on a community it constructs, but different groups and nations within a state can assert resource nationalism (Koch and Perrault 2018, 612). Manifestations of resource nationalism can come in the form of state-led activity like industry nationalizations, or through murals in cities expressing the desire for sovereignty (Kohl and Farthing 2012, 227). In Bolivia, the 2009 Constitution declared the country to be a “plurinational state,” acknowledging the existence of many indigenous nations existing within its boundaries. Furthermore, the Bolivian government creates other communities while attempting to assert “the people.” If we understand the nation as an imagined community, resource nationalists construct community based on natural resources. They believe that the people of the nation should benefit from the natural resources below and around them, not foreign enterprises. Koch and Perrault (2018) interestingly unpack the etymology of resource nationalism, revealing
that the two distinct terms are linguistically and conceptually related. In Bolivia, natural resources are frequently called “patrimonio nacional” or national patrimony (621). Patrimonio has origins in the word patria, meaning fatherland, and patriótica, or patriotic. In the Andean region, patria is more frequently used than nación to refer to the nation. So, patrimonio nacional distinctly connects natural resources to nationalism (622). The MAS uses resource nationalist frames and actions to fill a historic longing and further their development agenda.

In Bolivia, anti-imperialism is closely linked to nationalism. With continued grievances and feelings of collective loss from colonialism and privatizations, anti-imperial sentiment is salient among Bolivians who feel their territory has been unfairly seized or exploited by outsiders. Nationalism and anti-imperialism mobilize the Bolivian population. When these items are connected to natural resource governance, citizens view resources as a way to solve the country’s economic problems. That connection creates unrealistic expectations or imaginaries (Kohl and Farthing 2012, 226). Extractivism, the process of natural resource exploitation which can be lucrative for a resource-rich country, only furthers these imaginaries. Extractive industries are capital- and technology-intensive, yet do not generate employment opportunities or stimulate local economies (226). Bolivia’s economy depends on resource rents from natural gas, and the MAS uses those rents to fund social welfare programs. Extractivism for social purposes exists as the actualization of resource nationalist frames. Resource rents fund cash transfer programs like Renta Dignidad for the elderly, Juana Azurduy for pregnant mothers, or Juancito Pinto for school-age children (Bebbington 2018). Control of natural resources benefits those of the resource-nationalist nation.

Resource nationalism keeps emotional subjects like dispossession or underdevelopment salient in the population. Likewise, constant reinforcement of grievances through national
holidays, speeches, and laws serve as an ongoing reminder of the collective nation. The 1879–1883 War of the Pacific against Chile continues to be a prominent example used in resource nationalist discourse. In the War, Bolivia lost its coastline, and thus major access to natural resources and exporting routes. The annual Day of the Sea holiday commemorates this loss and reminds the nation of grief and resentment. Constant reminders of loss make it more likely that policy actions to reverse trends of dispossession will be popular among the public.

Evo Morales came to power as a result of the ousting of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada over his plans to export natural gas to Chile. A grassroots assertion of resource nationalism, Morales’ claiming that “the gas is ours” during the 2003–2005 Gas War protests signaled the Bolivian repossession over natural resources. Similarly, Supreme Decree 2870, the hydrocarbon nationalization executive order, is aptly titled “Heroes of the Chaco.” The title references the War of the Chaco with Paraguay from 1932–35, a war in which Bolivia lost numerous soldiers and territory (Kohl and Farthing 2012, 229). Such a title binds natural resources to a national imaginary about defense of territory and the reassertion of sovereignty.

While resource nationalism exists a powerful grievance, the associated tangible nationalization policies allow the government to profit from a lucrative industry. Refounding the YPFB meant the state once again benefited from the minerals below the surface and increased its national revenue by 578% (Arauz et al. 2019, 8). More importantly, resource nationalist policies gave the state the ability to take back power and renegotiate contracts with foreign enterprises. Such a demonstration of sovereignty solidified the nation as a true business partner and not merely a subordinate.

With its appeals to collective anger and loss, resource nationalism shares many attributes with the populism expressed by Evo Morales and the MAS. While the ideology exists as a
distinct political and economic concept, it is exercised in tandem with populism in Bolivia. The simplest way to assume the will of the populist people is to make a nation salient. In the case of Bolivia, the enduring effects of colonization and an abundance of natural resource wealth create a situation in which the government easily unifies the population behind the cause. Moreover, resource nationalism exists as an actual policy commitment used by the MAS to re-engage in the realm of international commerce and indicate state power after decades of submission to foreign actors.

**Ethno-environmentalism**

Ethno-environmentalism permeates many aspects of both MAS governance and Bolivian society and complicates the government’s strategy and policy options. The term ethno-environmentalism describes the inextricable connections understood by Latin American indigenous groups between indigeneity and respect for the natural environment. Although articulated differently at different times by state and indigenous actors, ethno-environmentalism highlights the centrality of both ethnicity and natural resources in politics. As the third evaluative dimension for understanding Evo Morales, it is important to acknowledge how he and the MAS alter the indigenous worldview of Vivir Bien to fit their own strategic political goals. Non-state actors promote ethno-environmental ideas to showcase the contradictions embedded in state policy and counter the MAS development agenda. There is no indigeneity in Bolivia without careful consideration of its relationship to the natural world.

Espoused in both rhetoric and law, both the indigenous state headed by Morales and indigenous coalitions assert the notion of Vivir Bien, or Living Well. Indigenous ontologies extend throughout Bolivian culture, consisting of alternate forms of knowledge and ways of knowing the world. Vivir Bien has gained influence throughout Latin America and is at the core
of critical Bolivian legislation, including the 2009 Constitution. Vivir Bien merges environmental and indigenous discourse, embracing legal pluralism and brings territoriality into question (Lalander and Lembke 2018, 637). While the concept builds upon highly regarded international legislation, it cannot be attributed to a single tribe or group. The indigenous social philosophy presents nature at the center of human life, instead of economic gains (Svampa 2019, 43). Vivir Bien defines the relationship between indigeneity and nature, and redefines the relationship between human beings and other living things. Rather than support absolute conservation, Vivir Bien advances the notion of maintenance and regeneration of life while valuing thoughtful and sustainable development. The wealth of natural resources in Bolivia is the wealth of all, and must be treated as such (Svampa 2019, 44). These ideas of collective wellbeing oppose the mode of development that dominated the 20th century and serve as another manifestation of anti-imperialism and nationalism in the country. Vivir Bien exists across the Andes region, particularly in Ecuador, another nation that adopted radical environmental legislation protecting the rights of nature (Postero 2017, 95).

The state frequently posits Vivir Bien as a development model supporting a generous social safety net that uplifts indigenous communities. A class-based perspective is useful to understanding how those who face the brunt of environmental consequences from climate change and extractive megaprojects might support state action. While indigenous groups are on the frontlines of environmental damage, they often comprise Bolivia’s poorest classes. Bearing the brunt of the contamination burden, these groups also receive the largest fraction of redistributive programs (Lalander and Lembke 2018, 641). Cash transfer programs allow natural resource revenues to directly reach the population. Although Bolivian programs like the Juancinto Pinto transfer for school-age children are not means-tested, they are progressive in that
poorer families utilize the public system at a higher rate than wealthier families (McGuire 2013, 15).

Moreover, between Juancinto Pinto and Juana Azurduy, the poorest half of the population received 60% of the programs’ benefits (15). Of impoverished people in Bolivia, 18.2% are indigenous persons facing extreme poverty, living off less than $1.90USD each day (UN News 2020). Therefore, a large fraction of the Bolivian and particularly indigenous population rely heavily on the state, regardless of the weight of environmental burden placed on these groups. The harming actor gives the injured group welfare, and a transactional relationship emerges. In this way, the MAS government rejects Vivir Bien in practice, as the choice between ethno-environmentalism and welfare funded by development is mutually exclusive (Lalander and Lembke 2018, 637). Members of indigenous tribes face a “Catch-22,” weighing the relative benefits between the two essential aspects of their livelihoods: sustain a stable lifestyle, or protect the environment in which one lives (636).

Indigenous groups also articulate ethno-environmentalism, as the merging of discourses existed long before the MAS’s rise to power. Indigenous people have been organizing around environmental issues for decades, aware firsthand of their vulnerability to the damaging effects of environmental exploitation (Postero 2017, 102). Extractive megaprojects like open-pit mining and expansion of the agricultural frontier contaminate soil, streams, and groundwater. Such contamination disperses far from the pollution’s source, harming many aspects of natural ecological processes. Moreover, the expansion of extractive projects raises questions of the state asserting its representative status above all else. By acting as the primary negotiator of projects, the state considers itself the main entity promoting ethno-environmentalism and in doing such
claims to speak for all its constituents. It negotiates contracts for environmental havens with the outside world while at times denying indigenous nations within its political boundaries a voice.

Indigenous ontologies are deeply connected to respect, protection, and sustainable use of the environment. More than a series of state-led decrees, ethno-environmentalism merges discourses and attitudes and encompasses a spectrum of ideas. Vivir Bien both guides indigenous plans for sustainable development and acts as a useful tool for promoting a progressive agenda on the international front.

**Economic Constraints**

Any new evaluative framework must consider the economic context of its subject. Over the course of Evo Morales’ presidency GDP per capita has doubled and poverty rates have fallen. Given this relative growth in income and development, questions remain as to how this came to be and what implications it has on governing decisions. Are state actors really constrained in their decision-making by commodity prices? I find that the progressive rhetoric and policy action of resource nationalism best explain the economic context and subsequent decision-making by the MAS. Structural forces cannot be considered an independent variable for development decisions made by the government. Instead, resource nationalism should be understood as the primary constraint on governance, regardless of market commodity prices. When commodity prices are high, the desire to capitalize further upon gains increases, and thus the desirability of resource nationalization increases. When commodity prices are low, resource nationalist ideals encourage state-led development. Understanding resource nationalism as the constraining variable rather than global commodity price fluctuations explains why unpopular decision-making still occurs in cases like the TIPNIS despite a strong commodity market.
From the turn of the millennium until at least 2014, Latin American development was mainly based on large-scale primary exports and rising commodity prices. With this commodity boom, the period saw prices of energy and mineral exports rapidly increase due to emerging importer markets in Brazil and much of Asia, particularly China. After decades of stagnation, this market boom boosted economies across the region. Maristella Svampa (2019) classifies the era as the commodities consensus, an era of Latin American exports and expansion of consumption. These economic conditions brought a number of advantages and positive externalities. In Bolivia, this productivist vision of development became dominant. As one of the most natural resource-rich countries on Earth, the Bolivian government enjoyed how the boom generated foreign currency for the state. While neoliberal effects such as mine closure and water privatization contributed to rural and urban income loss, Morales moved Bolivia from a neoliberal model firmly towards state-led development under an assertion of resource nationalism. Resource nationalism arguments combine analysis of populist rhetoric and economic indicators, revealing that there are few clear effects of global commodity prices (and their subsequent fall) on Bolivian development.

Broadly speaking, resource nationalism exerts sovereignty over natural resources that fall within the borders of the state. In economic terms, governments may choose to nationalize entire industries or sectors, typically oil and gas, with the goal of increasing state revenues. Extraction then operates through state-owned enterprises. The Bolivian case differs slightly from this narrative, opting for a heterodox economic strategy. On May 1, 2006, Evo Morales announced the nationalization of the hydrocarbons industry. Exactly one year later, he declared all national territory to be a public mining reserve. These actions were not as extreme as the rhetoric and press attention surrounding them would imply. Rather than true expropriation of foreign assets,
nationalization in Bolivia consisted of renegotiations with multinational companies. Renegotiations increased taxes and royalty rates on extraction by foreign enterprises that directly fed government accounts by increasing resource rents. The government sought to control the commercialization of its natural resources by altering contracts with its primary hydrocarbon importers like Petrobras from Brazil and Argentinian enterprises. Part of this “nationalization” also included reviving and refounding the state-owned gas company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB). Economists found this nationalization endeavor to be a success as government revenue increased from $731 million USD in 2006 to $4.95 billion in 2014 (Arauz et. al. 2019, 8). Such an increase in revenue cannot be attributed to commodity price increases, as Figure 6 below shows that global prices peaked in the year nationalization was first enacted. These revenues contributed to economic stability and funded social welfare projects like cash transfers for children and the elderly. In addition, they raised the minimum wage which has subsequently lowered the number of people facing extreme poverty in the country.

Many authors consider path-dependent effects when analyzing the Bolivian economic context. Under a path dependency framework, previous decisions and sociopolitical processes shape subsequent ones, complicating economic diversification. I argue that past rhetoric of resource nationalism stemming back to the Gas War preceding the 2006 election of Evo Morales necessarily inhibits future action by the state. During the gas conflict, social actors including the MAS called for an end to foreign gas exploitation and the reassertion of the state in the hydrocarbons industry. Connecting foreign exploitation to narratives of dispossession during the gas conflicts established the basis for nationalization once the MAS won power. Just one hundred days into his presidency, Morales ordered the nationalization of oil and gas and thus the reassertion of sovereignty over natural resources within Bolivia’s borders away from
multinational companies (Morales 2006). This was a decision largely done to achieve a populist vision of reasserting the people versus the (foreign) elites. Resource nationalism was a direct break with IMF prescriptions which called for strengthening decentralization processes, cutting state spending, and adhering to market trends. The original decision to pursue state-led development comes from the promises and implementation of resource nationalism, not by an analysis of optimal commodity prices.

Resource rents climbed throughout the start of the 2000s but peaked in 2006, with natural resource rents accounting for 14.93% of the GDP. While Bolivia enjoyed relatively high rents until an intense dip in 2015, resource rents cannot explain the full story due to the 2008 global recession. With 2009 rents dipping drastically to 8.17%, true commodity-based constraints would imply a change in development strategy according to material forces like a recession. Bolivia remained steadfast regardless of resource rent income levels. The recession did not affect the nation’s overall economy as officials implemented effective countercyclical measures. Moreover, resource rents were quickly recovered. Their value fluctuation did not impact choices made by the MAS. Around the time of the TIPNIS conflict in 2011, rents were indeed on the up, meaning the government was enjoying a relative surplus of income as context for decisions. There was no incentive to begin highway building or exploratory projects in protected areas. The MAS did not propose building the San Ignacio de Moxos highway through a protected area out of concern for national income. Rents have not created broad-based development in Bolivia, yet arguments assuming they are responsible for low economic growth miss how political decisions surrounding extraction generate problems instead.
Figure 6. Total natural resource rents of Bolivia expressed as percent of GDP.

Adding to the argument that material forces cannot be the primary reason behind decisions made by Morales and the MAS, most of Morales’ presidency was not actually marked by extreme growth in commodity prices. As shown in Figure 7 below, the 2008 global recession marked the end of the true height of the boom. From 2009 onwards, there has been a net decline in natural gas prices. Evo was only entering his second of what would become three terms in office when this dip began. The commodity boom and bust clearly does not dictate choices in governance. Moreover, external debts remain consistently low throughout the MAS’s time in power. Figure 8 indicates that while in 2006 more than half the country’s GDP was external debt (54.6%), in the years following the debt has stayed below 40%, averaging at 32.3% of total GDP. Such consistency negates an argument for debt fueling and/or constraining decisions. Although
Bolivia is frequently grouped with countries that suffer from the resource curse of economic underperformance and overabundance of natural resources, in reality, the nation has shown steady improvement on many economic and social indicators.

**Figure 7. Producer price index by commodity: Natural gas.**

**Figure 8. External debt of Bolivia as percentage of GDP.**
Resource nationalism is the primary constraint on the Bolivian government. The hydrocarbons industry nationalization in 2006 stirred not only economic sentiment but political and social support from a wide array of domestic actors. Such a policy move and surrounding rhetoric set the course for the next decade and beyond. The desire to reassert sovereignty sustained future policy choices, not external market forces. Resource nationalism creates a clash between the aggressive, pro-development ideology of the political left and indigenous communities that support reassertion of sovereignty yet oppose state economic intervention at all costs. Many scholars support this idea. In her later work, Linda Farthing (2019) argues that the MAS has been a political project rather than an economic one. She too sees policy actions as more autonomous from material forces. Under Morales, Bolivian society changed drastically in a sociopolitical manner, but less occurred terms of structural change.

Interestingly, the MAS refutes any path-dependent argument. This is unsurprising when a populist lens is applied, as populist leaders and administrations seek to distance themselves from all prior action, even from a history they created. The MAS seeks to brand each policy decision as fully unique. Regarding the TIPNIS conflict, in the official state rebuke, former Vice President Álvaro García Linera contributes to a resource-nationalist argument, stating that the TIPNIS highway building project is strictly a nationalist project: it is not part of any regional development plans and is anti-imperialist in nature (García Linera 2013, 29). The goal of the project is to ultimately bring about the nationalization of the Bolivian Amazon. I view this perspective as path-dependent, again based on resource nationalism. Once the state asserted such a discourse it was necessarily going to impact all future choices.

This economic contextualization and discussion shows that in the Bolivian case, neoliberal market forces did not restrict decision-makers. Evo Morales and the MAS make
choices freely, dependent only on their past resource nationalism. While the rise and fall of commodity prices at the start of the 21st century had some impact, their influence is markedly less than some researchers contend.

**Contradictions Intensify: The TIPNIS Conflict**

After a relatively peaceful first term in power, Evo Morales and the MAS had seemingly succeeded transforming the state. They had nationalized hydrocarbons, renegotiated greater profits for the state, implemented a broad social welfare program, and adopted greater respect for indigenous peoples in rhetoric and legislation. Bolivia solidified its place in the world order as an ethnic and environmental haven with economic prosperity and increased visibility of the long-marginalized indigenous communities. Still, by 2011 the country faced complex and widespread socioenvironmental conflict over the announcement of a highway-building project through the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS), a protected area home to a number of indigenous people and vast amounts of biodiversity. The MAS continued to use resource nationalist and populist tropes to defend the invasive project, many of the indigenous coalitions that brought the party to power emerged as strong opponents to the highway. As the MAS attempted to justify the project, the unified bloc of indigenous interests dissolved. The reactions, intersections, and divergences of these interest groups over time illustrate a functional coming together of populism, resource nationalism, and ethno-environmentalism. Evo Morales negates the ethnic aspect of his populism as the conflict evolves, prioritizing economic growth above all.

**Interests of the MAS**

Like many populist parties, the MAS’s interests throughout the duration of the TIPNIS conflict exemplify one set of interests in principle and a conflicting set of interests in practice.
Although resource nationalism aims to blend issues of natural resource governance with state sovereignty, the MAS took the concept one step further by attempting to implement such a nationalism within a plurinational state. Asserting plurinationalism in some settings and a singular, ideologically homogeneous state in others leads the MAS to contradict many of its original promises. In principle, the MAS frequently asserts ideas of Vivir Bien (Living Well) and concretizes these ideals in constitutional legislation. Yet when faced with internal conflict over the use of natural resources, the government tends to desert those ideals. Charting legal and political communication, I demonstrate how the MAS prioritized the economic side of resource nationalism over sovereignty and self-determination discourses due to the allure of developmentalism.

Setting the stage: Government-led environmentalism

The TIPNIS conflict has roots in a number of social issues, many of which predate Evo Morales and the MAS. Still, their rise to power corresponded with a reassertion of indigeneity in political life, a renewal that empowered rural and indigenous coalitions to defend their rights. Evo’s first term mainly revolved around transforming electoral rhetoric into actual governance. For the purposes of this thesis, the first critical piece of legislation to examine that reveals the MAS’s interests is Supreme Decree 28701, or the executive order to nationalize the hydrocarbons industry. The 2006 nationalization decree, while not outright related to the indigenous peoples of the TIPNIS, evokes themes of dispossession. It opens with the consideration of historical struggle, stating that “the people have won at the cost of their blood, the right that our hydrocarbon wealth returns to the hands of the nation” (Morales 2006, 2). A strong beginning, the declaratory sentence connects bloodshed to hydrocarbon wealth, particularly to devastating wars in the 1930s in which the country ceded strategic territory.
Moreover, use of “the people” signals a reference to the same people who elected Morales to power. As an executive decree, much of the order’s language reflects ethnopopulist campaign styles. Here, side-by-side, Morales connects the people to the nation’s natural resources. The Decree proclaims that hydrocarbons are national assets and deems all existing contracts unconstitutional (2). Reflecting the spectacular nature of populism, Evo describes the privatization of the state oil company YPFB as an “act of treason” because it gave away national sovereignty to foreign powers (3). The text of the decree claims it is a full nationalization, but then describes a case-by-case negotiation process. From the start, the MAS closely combined elements of resource nationalism and populism. By including themes of territorial dispossession at the decree’s beginning, Morales indicates a regard for his population’s indigenous heritage.

Delivering on promises for a refounding of the state, the MAS presented a new constitution in 2009, which handily passed a public referendum. The constitution expands the rights of all Bolivians, explicitly increasing the visibility of its indigenous populations. With the goal of building a new state, the document presents radical themes of indigenous autonomy and environmentalism as the basis of the nation. Still, the constitution includes conflicting language on land and territory that only heightens tensions as the TIPNIS conflict evolves. A content analysis shows that unity, sovereignty, natural resources, environment, indigeneity, and related terms appear most frequently throughout the document. On a simple search metric, ‘indígena/s’ appears 130 times, more than double the appearances of unity or natural resources. The preamble sets out a key contrast between the prior neoliberal era and the new plurinational state, governed by the MAS in conjunction with the people (Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia 2009, 7). Chapter One discusses the concept of pluralism in economic, political, legal, cultural, and linguistic terms (11). This pluralism is the natural continuation of inclusive populism. With Spanish and 35
indigenous languages all recognized as official, the constitution implies an easy coexistence of the many nations within the Bolivian border. After a discussion of inclusive founding principles, the constitution then describes the refounding of the state based on decolonization. Article 9 calls for the responsible use of natural resources and the promotion of their industrialization (14). Interestingly, this is embedded and somewhat hidden among a listing of the state’s fundamental values and purposes.

In terms of rights and guarantees, Article 30 is entirely dedicated to rights of indigenous peoples and nations. These peoples are guaranteed the right to self-determination and territoriality, and to the protection of their sacred places (24-25). Point 15 of that same Article describes the right to prior consultation in good faith. The right to benefit from the exploitation of natural resources in indigenous territories follows (25). These two points taken together have great importance in the TIPNIS conflict, as the right to benefit becomes a common defense of harmful extractive practices. The 2009 constitution aims to develop a concept of government-led environmentalism. Article 342 says it is a duty of both state and people to protect natural resources and biodiversity (162). Beyond that concept, the constitution promises that “the State and society shall promote the mitigation of harmful effects to the environment” (162). Again, a contradiction arises in Article 348, which states that natural resources are of strategic interest to the development of the country (164). Under this logic, environmental exploitation is permissible so long as the Bolivian people have access to the economic benefits. This line of thought assumes that all people value economic gain over the environment. Article 390 expresses that the Bolivian Amazon should have special protection and introduces the concept of “desarrollo integral” or integral development, an idea that the MAS heavily promotes in future legislation (177). The constitution’s chapter on the Amazon rounds out the entire document, demonstrating
that the issue and ecosystem is top of mind for the government even before the emergence of widespread unrest. The constitution, while radical in comparison to other founding documents of nations worldwide, never addresses the how the indigeneity so widely celebrated in the opening chapters can coexist with the integral development concept elucidated as the text concludes. Attempting to mix these themes works for rhetorical purposes, but inconsistencies emerge in legislation.

Also in 2009, the MAS approved a 415 million dollar loan from the Brazilian national development bank (BNDES) to finance the construction of the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos highway (La Razón Digital 2011). The highway project would create infrastructure in a long-untouched region, the TIPNIS, opening the Bolivian Amazon to travel, transport, and perhaps more cynically, to extractivism and exploitation of resources. Home to a vast array of flora and fauna, the area has come under siege in recent years by illegal loggers. Critics worried that paving a road would only facilitate the intensification of such logging, in addition to the deforestation that must occur inherently for a road to be built.

By 2010, turmoil in the TIPNIS was simmering, but the state continued to output legislation that promoted environmental principles. Law 71 of 2010, the “Rights of Mother Earth,” sought to recognize the rights of nature as an obligation of both the State and society (La Asamblea Legislativa Nacional 2010, 1). Based on the principles of harmony, regeneration, Vivir Bien, and non-commercialization, the law considers Mother Earth as sacred, and addresses the deep interconnectedness all people have with nature. Article 8 presents the obligations of the state, namely to develop public policies that uphold the rights of nature and to create forms of production and consumption patterns that prevent overexploitation and allow people to live well
Article 9 encourages an active public — the same public that later faces repression when upholding the ideals of this law.

Conflict arises: The MAS response in principle

As indigenous groups united to engage in collective action opposing the TIPNIS highway project, the MAS’s response contradicts many of the principles laid out in key documents such as the 2009 constitution and Law 71. As conflict intensifies, the MAS’s official political communication outputs show a prioritization of resource nationalism and populist ideals, eschewing the indigeneity and related worldviews as expressed in legislation. Vice President Alvaro García Linera is a noted Marxist scholar who produced much of the official response to the crisis in the TIPNIS. In a book-length essay titled Geopolitics of the Amazon, García Linera refutes many key criticisms of the TIPNIS project. He starts by using a number of geopolitical arguments, emphasizing the historical need for a road connecting isolated parts of the country (García Linera 2013, 17). Foreign intervention and despotism are central themes relayed by the MAS that García Linera perpetuates (6). He states that “the major enemy of the presence of the protector state in the Amazon region at present is the international imperial-corporate structure” (19). The Vice President continually relies on imperialists as the Other in contrast to the protector state that is the political instrument of the people. Colonialism is at the root of his criticism, an attempt to connect indigenous demands of sovereignty and the assertion of self-determination as purported by the constitution to control over resources. Colonialism becomes a convenient trope to undercut legitimate arguments made in opposition to the state by indigenous people. García Linera blames outsiders when the real issue is internal. He refutes conservationist arguments, stating that a lack of state development in the area would be submitting to imperialist desires (10). Instead of acknowledging the demands of Bolivians, García Linera focuses his
response on the criticisms of the TIPNIS conflict made by outsiders. The response shows the importance of a developmentalist narrative for a leftist vision, with the opposition cast as neocolonial and an obstacle necessary to overcome.

As the conflict unfolded, newspaper articles provide timely evidence for the evolution of government policy. In July 2011, Evo Morales stated “whether they like it or not, we will build that road” (Collyns 2017). Morales uses “they” to posture that opposition comes from outside the inclusive, populist base he worked to build. On August 4, 2011, Morales argued that “say[ing] that no one has ever arrived [in the TIPNIS], is false. Logging businessmen have already removed wood for the entire Isiboro Sécure” (La Razón 2011a). Just days prior, Morales announced that the road would go forward regardless of the consultation results, although they would be considered (La Razón, 2011b). His steadfastness shows a clear prioritization of resource nationalism and economic growth above all, particularly after he admitted the consultation would not be binding per se.

Response in practice

Turmoil in the summer of 2011 continued into the fall months, creating the first true crisis of governance for the MAS. On September 25, 2011, reports emerged that 500 police attacked indigenous protesters at their camp at Chaparina (Achtenberg 2011). After being invited to resume negotiations with the government while marching in protest of the highway project, protesters were beaten, gagged, and arrested en masse. The violent repression brought widespread condemnation, and led to the resignations of Defense Minister Cecilia Chacón and Minister of the Interior Sacha Llorenti (Achtenberg 2011). After silence from Morales in the first 24 hours, the president stated that he did not order nor condone the police actions. No one in government has taken responsibility for giving the police orders to break up the camps, and there
has been a noteworthy lack of discourse in general about the violation of indigenous protesters’ rights.

Legislation materialized in the wake of the protests and the Chaparina massacre. Law 180 of October 2011 emerged as a direct response to the events in the TIPNIS. It acknowledges the TIPNIS as home to the Chimán, Yuracaré, and Mojeño-trinitario people (La Asamblea Legislativa Nacional 2011, 2). Most importantly, Law 180 declares the TIPNIS a “zona intangible,” or untouchable, and says the highway will not cross the TIPNIS (2). While a victory on the surface, most indigenous actors did not desire absolute conservation as it prohibits all economic activity within the untouchable zone. Absolute conservation or an untouchable designation also prohibits any new human settlements within the territory. Deeming the area untouchable was not in good faith — the MAS knew it was not the optimal outcome for any party. It was also not a compromise. Law 180 is an avoidance of the problem and a denial of valid and constructive criticisms. By promoting absolute conservation, the state no longer engages with a public conflict that tests the limits of progressive governance in a resource-rich state like Bolivia.

The state continued to promote legislation surrounding the TIPNIS. Law 222 of February 2012 legislates the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) process to the people of the TIPNIS, calling on both the 2009 constitution as well as international doctrines like the International Labor Organization Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (La Asamblea Legislativa Nacional 2012, 1). One of the primary issues of the consultation process would be the issue of the TIPNIS’ untouchable nature. If the consulted groups deem any activity acceptable, development projects like the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos highway could be permitted.
In October 2012, the state began explicitly promoting development as a way to achieve Vivir Bien. Law 300 expands the rights of Mother Earth doctrine and defines fundamental concepts of Living Well and Integral Development. It places Vivir Bien in contrast to the rights of Earth, as though they are not naturally compatible items. The law is concerned with ensuring balance while allowing environmental measures and development to occur, a major revision from its 2010 predecessor, Law 71. Article 5 provides the definitions of concepts used throughout the MAS’s tenure that had been kept indefinite until this point. Living Well “is the civilizing and cultural horizon alternative to capitalism and modernity that is born in the worldviews of the nations of native indigenous peoples” (La Asamblea Legislativa Nacional 2012, 7). The MAS speaks for its indigenous populations through this definition yet offers no indication that groups were consulted when crafting a definition that explains their specific perspectives. Living Well exists along social, cultural, political, economic, ecological, and affective dimensions (7). A primary concern of progressive governments is the welfare of its people, and Vivir Bien encapsulates those desires within an indigenous philosophical framework. The MAS’s mention of indigeneity in law signals an awareness by the party of the identity’s utility, especially in mobilizing support for policies. Law 300 also defines “Integral Development to Live Well” as a continuous process of “generation and implementation of social measures and actions...for the creation, provision, and strengthening of conditions, capacities, and material, social, and spiritual means” (7). This law situates integral development within ethnic practices and frameworks. It keeps the functional mixing of these two elements vague again, as in reality the Chaparina violence and fallout on the domestic and international fronts had already taken place. The government essentially revises the original Earth bill, Law 71, and inserts development goals side by side with the environmental initiatives.
The MAS on the International Front

As these events unfolded, Evo Morales continued to be active in the global arena, presenting numerous speeches at international institutions. His speeches at the UN highlight themes of imperialism, resource nationalism, peaceful settlements, and human rights, yet noticeably refrain from covering indigeneity and indigenous rights outside of a discourse critiquing foreign intervention. In 2011, Morales spoke about global wealth inequality and poverty, remarking that “imperialism seeks to control the sources of energy throughout the world” (Morales 2011, 11). He focuses his address on imperialism and intervention, shying away from a discussion of the power struggle over energy resources taking place within his own borders. In order to “free” Bolivia, he says that “[Bolivia’s] natural resources can never be privatized. They can never be handed over to transnational companies” (12). Throughout the speech, Morales uses first person “we” and “our,” relying on populist style even on the international front. His speech is largely revisionist, stating that “we nationalized and recovered” the country’s natural resources, implying they were saved. That “saving” largely conflicts with the intended deforestation and destruction of the Amazon for the proposed infrastructure project. He concludes his speech with mention of “the constant struggle of peoples for dignity and sovereignty” (13) but regarding a United States military base, not the actual struggles taking place at the same time. Note the dates: the violence at Chaparina took place just four days after the UN speech, right in the midst of the Eighth Indigenous March, a march in protest from the TIPNIS to the capital, La Paz. In his 2012 speech to the UN General Assembly, Morales again negates domestic conflict, focusing on populist ideas of imperialism. He declared, “in truth, I do not understand it when the presidents who speak in defense of human rights are never the ones who respect humans, either within or outside their own countries” (Morales 2012, 13).
Criticizing foreign leaders has always been a huge part of Morales’ platform. Anti-imperialist rhetoric distracts leaders and his own public from making valid critiques.

Adding irony to his quote from the 2012 UN General Assembly, in August 2013, human rights NGO Amnesty International filed a report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, alleging excessive use of force by police during the violence at Chaparina in 2011. The report details hundreds of police obstructing peaceful protesters in the Beni department, using “excessive and indiscriminate tear gas and truncheons” on unarmed protesters (Amnesty International 2013, 19). The report documents 70 injured people and 200-300 detainees. It also describes attacks on doctors who joined the march (19). These actions violated UN principles on the use of force. Moreover, the Amnesty report highlights the conflict in the TIPNIS and the consultation process, arguing that the right to FPIC was not respected in Bolivia (25). While Bolivia has ratified key international conventions on prior consultation, Amnesty argued that the government had made its decision about the road ever since the MAS rose to power in 2006, without input from indigenous peoples (27). Certain aspects of the TIPNIS project and its legislation were not adequately explained during the consultation process, creating a “climate of mistrust” (29). A consultation done in good faith cannot take place under such hostile conditions. The findings of the report exemplify resource nationalism at the expense of key constituents. The TIPNIS exposes the cracks in Morales’ united front.

Conflict continues

In the years after the prior consultation, conflict has quieted, but not disappeared altogether. Morales and the MAS continue to bring up the project and draft new legislation. After the passage of Law 300, in 2017 the government again updated TIPNIS rules, creating Law 969. The law erases previous rulings, again opening up the TIPNIS to development projects. Using
the guise of “integral development,” the bill aims to support similar principles to Law 300 and prior, yet supposedly includes the results of the prior consultation. Still, the law focuses on sustainable development, a marked change from the conservation and rights of Mother Nature developed in earlier rules. Article 8 says the state will promote sustainable development projects that support key basic needs, like health and education (La Asamblea Legislativa Nacional 2017, 3). From the MAS’s earliest days, the party billed the premise of funding a progressive policy agenda through extractive development as complementary. As conflict devolved, the issues with such an economic model became clear. Article 9 confirms the intent of the MAS to open up the territory, based on “improving the rights of indigenous peoples” (3). Few other times does the party get as explicit as stating the permissibility of “free movement, through the opening of local roads, highways, river navigation systems, and others” (3). Law 969 blatantly allows for the highway building project once more. Ten years after the nationalization, Article 10 of Law 969 advances the ability of private development activities (4). The language specifies that “the development of productive activities may be carried out with the participation of private parties, provided that there are agreements...with the indigenous peoples of the TIPNIS” (4). The article does not mention a full FPIC process, only calling for “agreements” that include a favorable percentage of the profit for indigenous groups. Keeping the specifics of “favorable” vague, Law 969 strays far from the original environmental legislation promoted during Morales’ first and second terms. By 2017, Morales faced mounting criticisms and electoral conflict.

Indigenous Interests

While a combination of populism, resource nationalism, and performance of indigeneity helped Evo Morales and the MAS reach power, as economic priorities for the government shifted, the party largely discarded indigenous interests. With the announcement of a
construction agreement with Brazilian multinational OAS in 2008, infrastructure and extractive projects have threatened the populations living in protected areas. In the TIPNIS, indigenous groups have had to organize and collectivize their visions and demands to counter the hardening of the MAS’s developmentalist stance. Still, indigenous peoples do not have homogenous understandings on all issues, as evidenced by diverging alliances during the conflict. The MAS’s all-or-nothing approach to the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos highway project exacerbated existing tensions between indigenous preferences and MAS priorities. Indigenous coalitions and leaders argue that values of environmentalism and respect for Mother Earth, as dictated in Bolivian law, are disregarded by the state. Throughout the conflict, power dynamics shift as indigenous groups use different strategies to have their demands heard both domestically and globally. This section aims to illuminate indigenous interests that exist and evolve alongside the official state communication and legislation discussed above.

A hopeful alliance

In the years before Evo Morales’ initial presidential victory, indigenous and rural workers’ organizations converged to form an alliance in support of indigenous and agrarian rights. The Unity Pact is a fluid confederation of grassroots organizations throughout Bolivia, concerned with environmentalism, agriculture, and a generally redistributive political agenda (Prada 2010). While membership has shifted over time, five key groups ground the Pact, many of which formed during the emergence of the modern indigenous movement in Latin America in the 1980s. La Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa” (CNMCIOB) stems from women’s indigenous unions and is primarily concerned with women’s equality in Bolivia. Their mission statement stresses concern with capitalistic destruction and how the rich have strayed from indigenous cosmovisions
La Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB) seeks territorial integrity, a true pluralist society, and sustainable management of natural resources (CSUTCB 2021). The organization is rooted in rural workers’ trade unions, with a specifically campesino base (as opposed to strictly indigenous). La Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales Originarias de Bolivia (“Interculturales”) is another specifically campesino organizing community (CSIOB 2021). From Bolivia’s lowlands come the National Council of Ayllus and Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ) and the Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB), both created to combat the historical marginalization of specifically lowland indigenous people. The bases of these groups, both territorially and ethnically, becomes important as conflict develops.

The Unity Pact was closely allied with the MAS throughout Morales’ first term, engaging the state on a variety of topics like land reform, and the incorporation of Vivir Bien into law. As a movement-based party, the MAS aimed to utilize its grassroots origins. The Unity Pact drafted legislation specifically pertaining to the defense of the environment in Bolivia, citing concerns about contamination stemming from deforestation and desertification, both of which are exacerbated by the climate crisis (Prada 2010). The effects of the climate crisis, including heightened weather events such as droughts and flooding, put indigenous and rural peoples, frequently the most vulnerable populations in a nation, in a state of emergency. While the Unity Pact evolved in ideology over time, its original positioning showed great concern for the environment. The core of indigenous concerns as represented by the Pact revolve around predatory practices both by the state and by transnational corporations.

After the adoption of the 2009 constitution, indigenous communities had ample cause to be optimistic about the transformation of state practices in the natural world. The new
constitution promised heightened indigenous visibility and political and cultural pluralism. Moreover, it embedded concepts of ethno-environmentalism into law. With newfound hope, the Unity Pact drafted their own proposed version of what would become the Law of Mother Earth, Law 71. The Draft Law aimed to realize deep respect for the planet, and provide a new understanding of relationships between state, Earth, capital, and society. The preamble invokes the earth goddess Pachamama and ideas of Mother Earth while describing metaphysical concepts and the interconnection between all living beings (CSUTCB et. al. 2010, 1). It explicitly repudiates the concept of natural resources, as the term “manifests the relationships of dispossession of nature by the capitalist world-system” (1). As a draft law, it was unlikely the MAS would adopt language like this as it stands entirely contrary to the party’s strategy of resource nationalism. Although the Unity Pact was still closely aligned with the government at this point in 2010, the draft law illuminates certain divergences between the two groups. The radical core of the draft law calls for epistemological displacement and the decentering of human beings from life (2). With heavy criticism of productivist mindsets, the indigenous drafters highlight the incompatibility of accumulation built on indigenous dispossession (3). The MAS rejects this analysis, emphasizing the benefits of capital accumulation for the wider public, particularly for impoverished indigenous populations. The Unity Pact stresses the collective dimensions of the global ecological crisis and the need to move away from unsustainable models. The Draft Law highlights indigenous ontologies that largely fall flat in actual legislation passed by the MAS.

The project contains a number of objectives revolving around defense of Mother Earth, promoting balance, and combating climate change. In terms of actionable changes, the draft calls for the implementation of public policies that guarantee sustainable management within a
framework of Vivir Bien (6). It proposes the creation of a management office with the mandate of environmental protection, and stresses the need to implement a precautionary principle into development legislation. It also stresses the importance of the right to prior consultation under ILO Convention 169. The document lists fourteen rights of Mother Earth, a list with such breadth that its adoption is hard to imagine. Rights include lack of genetic modification of plants, about maintaining identity, and even the right to “not be affected by hydroelectric megaprojects, of infrastructure and development that affect the balance of ecosystems” (16). These rights are conspicuously missing in the approved legislation, but in November 2010, the Unity Pact believed in the state’s willingness to respect indigeneity in a way no government had done prior. Indigenous persuasive capacity at this time was believed to be quite high due to the MAS’s respect of the indigenous governing organizations and its apparent willingness to work with these organizations in a democratic and non-hierarchical way.

Shattered trust and protests

The state adopted Law 71, titled the “Rights of Mother Earth,” in December 2010, supposedly based on the Draft Law presented a month prior. While the draft document gave exact recommendations and rights, Law 71 largely blurred the language, speaking only loosely about obligations of the state. Most noticeably, Article 7, which lays out the fundamental rights of nature, only retained half of the fourteen rights dictated in the Unity Pact draft (La Asamblea Legislativa Nacional 2010, 3). While there are discussions of consumption patterns and exploitation, the rights leave out protection from extractive industry projects or infrastructure development. The MAS obscures the real clashes between a modernist vision and retaining traditionality.
With the signing of construction contracts and applications for development loans, the MAS’s intent to build the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos highway through the TIPNIS became clear. As alliances shifted and trust diminished, indigenous leaders turned to the international front with their message to gain support and sympathy. A 2011 YouTube video titled *Message from TIPNIS to the World* garnered attention for the TIPNIS conflict and indigenous interests. In the video, two indigenous leaders discuss the government’s actions and reasons for preserving the TIPNIS. Justa Cabrera, a Guarani leader, describes the TIPNIS as “the lung of the country, of Latin America, and of the world.” Given this video’s context and its global audience, Cabrera uses traditionalist language and romanticized images of nature in order to gain sympathy for the cause. While the MAS deploys indigeneity as a tool to promote its own agenda, indigenous people also emphasize their own traditionality to serve specific goals. While some indigenous tribe members may live in protected areas, in many ways, they assimilate into a broader Bolivian culture and attend public schools with national curriculums. Still, when attempting to heighten awareness of the conflict in the TIPNIS, leaders may dress in traditional garments and use stereotypical phrases to perform a palatable indigeneity that gains national and international attention. Emigo Poiché, another indigenous leader, denounces the abuse against indigenous people during the Eighth March. With emotional descriptors of government’s genuine abuse and, Poiché again gains sympathy for the movement, creating a better positioning for indigenous people and their demands. Indigenous movements sought new avenues for impact as their relationship with the state deteriorated.

As conflict escalated, concerns heightened over the highway’s potential to facilitate exploitation, illegal logging, and further settlements and destruction of the TIPNIS ecosystems. CIDOB and CONAMAQ of lowland TIPNIS origins set out to organize what would become the
Eighth Indigenous March for the Defense of the TIPNIS, and the Territories, Life, Dignity, and Rights of Indigenous Peoples. With the name and concept based on the 1990 March for Territory and Dignity, the Eighth March aimed to expose contradictions in the discourse of the MAS and explicitly oppose the infrastructure project (Fundación Tierra 2011). While the government claimed the highway route was the most efficient option, indigenous coalitions worried about the expanded access outsiders would have to the protected territory and the precedent it would set (Achtenberg 2011). A highly visible march from the TIPNIS to the capital city would force a dialogue with the state. The March lasted two months, covering vast elevation and weather changes, and protestors faced hostility at numerous points on their path (Fundación Tierra 2011).

The protestors’ demands revolved around the incompatibility of indigenous ontologies and extractive megaprojects (Guzmán 2012, 2). While the March reflected territorial insecurities of CIDOB and CONAMAQ, it also shed light on the cultural and political insecurities felt by these groups. Although indigenous people living within the TIPNIS already had roads and connections, the MAS intended for new connections on the development front. At its core, the March questioned the MAS’s development strategy, fearing the destruction of territory (3). Indigenous distrust of the state stems from Bolivia’s history of colonization and exploitation. Antidemocratic decision-making relegates the indigenous population back to a marginalized status in a country where they are the ethnic majority. Protestors feared not only destruction of territory but loss of communities outright (10). Tribes in colonized areas in the southern portion of the TIPNIS had been displaced by cocalero settlers and feared further ethnocide (11).

As a collective action, the March generated peaceful solidarity among many indigenous actors. The Eighth March followed the precedents set since 1990 which revolved around themes of political participation, sovereignty, and natural resource management. While some of the past
marches aligned with campesino movements, the Eighth March specifically evoked the same indigenous groups, similar demands, and the same walking path as the original March for Territory and Dignity more than twenty years prior (Guzmán 2012, 20). The March’s route has sociocultural significance as well. Following the 1990 route, walking the same path and facing hardships in a similar way to the original protestors was of great spiritual importance to these people (17). Evoking past marches connects the specific demands of aggrieved persons in the TIPNIS to a larger historical dialogue and debate in Bolivia. The Eighth March was a two-month-long visibility campaign that underlined the importance of these issues to the organizing groups and heightened public engagement with the protected area. While the MAS discredited the march on the basis of “incomprehensible demands,” the dynamism and evolution of protestors’ demands show their adaptability and growing power. Protestors primarily organized around the immediate stoppage of the TIPNIS highway project, but the official list of sixteen demands included calls for security within indigenous territories from both internal and external threats, implementation of sustainable technologies to combat climate change, and the fulfillment of basic needs, particularly with regards to education. As the march continued, protestors coordinated their discourse surrounding these demands.

Marchers were met with extreme violence in September 2011 at Chaparina, where police used tear gas, beatings, and mass arrests to obstruct the March. Violent repression ordered by an unidentified state security force resolved to intimidate protestors both physically and psychologically (Guzmán 2012, 71). In terms of power dynamics, the Chaparina massacre represents a high point of indigenous power. Physical intimidation and trauma propelled protestors to recommit to their cause, with the march gaining more sympathy throughout the country. State-led oppression furthers solidarity and becomes a collective memory. The MAS’s
move further and further away from their original convictions strengthens the indigenous narrative of predation and destruction. The Eighth Indigenous March achieved its goal of stopping the highway project, as Morales signed Law 180 deeming the TIPNIS “untouchable” in October 2011. At the same time, the new designation outlawed all activity, including sustenance farming and small business within the defined territory. Indigenous groups had differing opinions on the efficacy of Law 180. A victory for some, the TIPNIS movement showed signs of major rift resulting from Law 180 and its implications.

In December 2011, a countermarch led by the Indigenous Council of the South (CONISUR) complicated the victory of Law 180 and assured the continuation of conflict in the TIPNIS. CONISUR represents 21 indigenous communities, primarily in the southern portion of the protected area, a section entirely within the Cochabamba department (Achtenberg 2012). Beyond indigenous tribes, CONISUR represents settlers who have moved into the TIPNIS to expand the coca farming economy. The group rejected Law 180 and area’s the untouchable because the highway would expand their access to markets across the country. Although living in the protected area, members of CONISUR with an organized economy dismiss traditionality and see it to their advantage that the MAS continues supporting them and the development of their area. The countermarch also represents the complexity of indigenous views as some tribes within CONISUR continued to align with the MAS.

Resulting from divisions over Law 180, CIDOB and CONAMAQ split from the Unity Pact, dissolving a major alliance between indigenous and campesino organizations. The remaining Unity Pact members were primarily unionists and campesinos aligned with the MAS (Rojas 2013). The split occurred because of MAS actions involving the TIPNIS. President of CIDOB Adolfo Chávez even remarked that the pact had become merely a yes-man to the
government. By breaking the Pact, CIDOB and CONAMAQ signaled extreme displeasure with the evolution of the MAS in governance. The move showed organizational fortitude, as potential dangers accompanying resistance had already been revealed at Chaparina.

The split groups sought to exercise their power and challenge the MAS majority after the CONISUR countermarch. In January 2012, five members of Congress moved to break with the MAS and form their own legislative bloc, an effort to force dialogue by ending the MAS’s two-thirds majority (Corz and Condori 2012). With the members who split registered as MAS representatives, the state argued their shift was an ethics violation and threatened to report the members. Despite the Unity Pact rift, this break with the powerful ruling party by just five congress members shows indigenous peoples at their strongest. The varying capacities of the actors are laid bare and we see the true extent of indigenous organizing in politics. As a movement-based party, the MAS suffers the loss of its majority when it fails to adhere to the will of its constituents. By threatening and implementing a voting split from the ruling party, CONAMAQ and CIDOB win the indigenous coalition much more power, both electorally and psychologically. A highly visible split, the indigenous bloc of five legislators has the advantage of major national attention, and forces the MAS to debate and consider their demands in order to reach a two-thirds consensus.

Consultation and consequences

The MAS doubled down on its conviction to push forward the TIPNIS project and reversed indigenous victories with the passage of Law 222, the Law of Consultation. The law reverses the “untouchable” language of Law 180, citing the need to decide on permissible development activities through a process of free, prior, and informed consent (La Asamblea Legislativa Nacional 2012, 1). CIDOB and other indigenous organizations planned a ninth
indigenous march to demand compliance with Law 180 and reveal the manipulation embedded in Law 222 (CIDOB and CNAMIB 2012, 1). In an official communiqué, five groups denounce intimidation allegedly done by paramilitary groups. The document cites video evidence of government meetings to prevent the march from occurring and the building of roadblocks to prevent citizens from joining the march (1). Communications like this highlight the willingness of the MAS to use antidemocratic measures to achieve its vision. Oppressive measures like cutting power to indigenous areas at random and inciting angry mobs to attack protestors indicate a major turning point in how the MAS must be characterized.

Things further deteriorated with the actual consultation process, occurring from July to December 2012. While the MAS claimed the TIPNIS consultation process met the standards set forth by Law 222 and international conventions, verification reports made by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights in Bolivia in conjunction with the Catholic Church (APDHB) contain heavy criticisms of the entire process. These groups found that the process was not performed in good faith. The verification mission intended to ensure the consultation met international law standards (APDHB and FIDH 2013, 4). The two groups visited 61% of communities involved in the consultation. Of 35 communities visited, only 19 were actually consulted by technicians from the state (4). Of consulted communities, some were given contradictory information.

A key convention in international law is the right to free, prior, informed consent as laid out in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and ILO Convention 169. The verification mission compendium states that there was nothing free, prior, or informed about the process, a sharp contrast to the rhetoric of the MAS. A “free” consultation process would mean a lack of coercion, but observing organizations found that criteria for decisions was imposed by state
technicians, and that the consultations took place within a “climate of confrontation and mutual distrust” (APDHB and FIDH 2013, 7). Location matters with consultation processes, and the government-dictated location meant that indigenous groups could not converse with their governments. Petty obstructions occurred, with the state denying fuel to the group TIPNIS Subcentral (7). Holding a community’s energy resources hostage in order to evoke positive responses cannot be considered a free process. The “prior” nature of consultation had long been violated, ever since the government decided to build the highway and signed legal agreements with Brazilian construction companies (6). Those decisions were made without any formal consultation process, so regardless of dialogue results, there was an open violation of FPIC principles. Lastly, the process was not “informed,” as dictated by Law 222 and other international conventions. Communities were not given all the information, particularly about the impacts of the road. Despite requests, indigenous communities reported never receiving an environmental impact report for the highway project (8). FPIC is an essential tool for indigenous groups to utilize to counter the state, but when states control the process, there is a high probability of an uneven playing field.

Much of the verification report centers around the term “untouchable” as used in the 2012 consultation law. The MAS twisted definitions of intangibility to include not only physical use but access to social welfare programs. People were told that if the area was left “untouchable,” then welfare benefits could not and would not be extended to them (8). Other groups were warned that they could not ask for a total rejection of the road during the consultation (9). Such blatant manipulation of the consultation process shows the MAS’s willingness to violate human rights codes and its own constitution and legislation in pursuit of its modernist development strategy. The state’s inclination to eschew democratic norms leaves the indigenous movement
significantly weakened. When the state sets aside democratic processes to exert force, power dynamics are permanently altered at the expense of the more democratic actor, in this case, the indigenous population.

**Enduring Consequences**

The TIPNIS conflict demonstrates a functional convergence of all evaluative dimensions of the MAS. In the relentless pursuit of modernist developmentalism, the MAS has shown a strong willingness to use antidemocratic measures to achieve its vision. As of August 2018, the conflict continues: indigenous groups have called upon international institutions to intervene and dampen the MAS’s development acceleration. A 2018 report from the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature found that the MAS had violated its own legal standing and international conventions, calling for a permanent halting of road construction due to the environmental threat it presents (Tribunal Internacional por los Derechos de la Naturaleza 2019, 25). The Tribunal uncovered extreme violations of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, a convention that Bolivia had spearheaded at the World Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba in 2010. Even when MAS–indigenous alliances were strong, the MAS repudiated indigeneity behind the scenes, seeing it as a roadblock to development. Those whom they mobilized have now mobilized against them, with both actors deploying symbolic aspects of indigeneity in order to advance their interests. When it is necessary, the party performs sacred rituals and holds international conventions. This brings goodwill to the nation and places it at the forefront of radical, cutting-edge environmental legal innovation. Nevertheless, the MAS builds vague ethno-environmental appeals into legislation to placate the very populations that brought and keep it in power.
Conclusion

This thesis has addressed the many frameworks available when analyzing former Bolivian president Evo Morales. Through the use of conjunctural analysis, I demonstrate how Morales and his party, the MAS, utilize elements of populism, resource nationalism, and ethno-environmentalism. Although the MAS tries to make these three political strategies compatible, its handling of the TIPNIS conflict demonstrates the impossibility of that convergence. Morales and the party prioritize modernist developmentalist visions above all else, a fact their strategy attempts to hide. Rather than truly work with the indigenous communities Morales promotes symbolically, the party understands the relationship between indigenous communities and government to be transactional: they fund social welfare and keep the economy relatively stable, and in turn, indigenous communities mobilize votes for the party. In pursuit of delivering on social promises, the MAS imposes unpopular and sometimes antidemocratic measures.

The TIPNIS conflict permanently marred the domestic trajectory and global perception of the MAS. The state’s interests evolved in such a way that key constituents not only disapproved of the party but key legislators shunned the party line. While the 2009 constitution and Law 71 yielded some of the most environmentally-conscious legislation in the region and world, the state’s nearly immediate turn to infrastructure development was an obvious dismissal of the ideals promoted in those documents. Although indigenous protestors called on protective legislation, such as Law 71 and Law 180, the government used resource nationalism and an extractivist economic strategy to negate protestors’ claims.

Morales, despite showing strong electoral popularity in his first three elections, began to falter in 2016 when he called a national referendum on the legality of his running for a fourth
presidential term. Although by close margins, the referendum did not go in his favor, with the “no vote” prevailing by a margin of 51.3% to 48.7% (Collyns and Watts 2016). Nevertheless, in November 2017, the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal abolished term limits for elected officials and struck down the results of the 2016 referendum (Farthing 2017). Morales then asserted typical populist rhetoric, claiming imperialist outsiders created a smear campaign ahead of the referendum. In 2019, Morales was forced to resign from office on the heels of a major electoral controversy in which the Organization of American States (OAS) found “irregularities” in the October 2019 presidential election (Farthing and Arigho-Stiles 2019). In the wake of his resignation, anti-MAS conservative leader Jeanine Áñez took power as interim president. Áñez quickly showed hostility towards indigenous-identifying Bolivians, casting their beliefs as paganism and using the word “savage” to describe over half of her constituents (Forster 2020). She was determined to reverse many of the inclusionary measures taken by the MAS to celebrate ethnic diversity and environmental respect. Although the irregularities claimed by the OAS have since been disputed and the MAS has returned to power, the controversy encapsulated a tumultuous tenure for Morales. While he entered power as an outsider, by the end of his tenure key indigenous constituents had left the party, as the once political instrument of the masses had taken on too many establishment-style tendencies.

Despite increased antidemocratic inclinations, Evo Morales and the MAS stand out in the ways they defy traditional classifications and provide a key point of comparison with other parties and social movements in the developing world. Inclusive campaigning and political rhetoric, as well as an internally democratic party structure allowed the MAS to eschew typical populist expectations and create a large base of ethnically diverse support. Evo Morales’ ethnopopulism fueled him to earn over half the votes in each of three elections, and only lost his
2016 referendum by a slim margin. Morales also connected grievances related to natural resource control to tangible policy commitments — a powerful strategy that funds a broad welfare program. His commitment to redistribution allowed him to solidify relationships with rural and indigenous communities that had been previously neglected by the state. While the extractivist model within a progressive state exists elsewhere, the indigenous demographic makeup of Bolivia further complicates the case. Morales had to provide for these vulnerable populations and listen to their demands while promoting a different ontological agenda in policy. Care for the natural environment and promotion of the rights of nature permeates the Bolivian political sphere, yet remains subordinate to the revenues of extractivism.

Other academics analyze Bolivia in a siloed manner: as a case study in radical populism, a resource-rich country struggling to capitalize on its natural wealth, or as a predominantly indigenous nation. Still, the TIPNIS conflict demonstrates how these seemingly distinct elements of populism, resource nationalism, and ethno-environmentalism intersect. Studies of Bolivian populism often see resource nationalism as a distinct political strategy. They fail to note that resource nationalism exists not only as a policy commitment but as a facet of populist discourse. Likewise, indigeneity and ethno-environmentalism as a whole play a major role in Bolivian populism, and is asserted in resource nationalist discourse. Examining these three elements in an integrative framework refutes singular narratives of Evo Morales and the MAS. An integrated analytical approach gives a more holistic account of Bolivian politics and provides a comparative lens to understand how global leaders balance and utilize seemingly contradictory political strategies.
## Appendix

### Timeline of Key Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) comes to power</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>New Economic Policy by MNR, liberalization begins</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>National tin mines close, leading unemployed migrants to move to Cochabamba</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>War on Drugs, Ley 1008 promotes coca eradication programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>First Indigenous March for Territory and Dignity</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>Law of Popular Participation, Decentralization Law</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>Hydrocarbons Law 1689: Privatized oil and gas industries</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>First elections with the MAS as a viable party option</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Water War in Cochabamba resulting from raised water prices</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Unity Pact between CSUTCB, CIDOB, Bartolina Sisa, CONAMAQ, CSCIB formed</td>
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<td>2003–2005</td>
<td>Both President Sánchez de Lozada and successor Carlos Mesa resign in the midst of protests over rising energy prices and plans to export natural gas</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005 December</td>
<td>The Movement Towards Socialism wins both the Presidency and majority in congress. Led by Evo Morales winning 53.7% of the votes</td>
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<td>2006 May 1</td>
<td>Nationalization of the hydrocarbon industry, refounding the YPFB: Supreme Decree 28701</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Morales signs construction contract signed for 306 km highway, to be completed in three sections</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008 September</td>
<td>US Ambassador expelled from Bolivia</td>
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<td>2008 November</td>
<td>Morales stops US Drug Enforcement Agency from operating in the country</td>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>2009 January</td>
<td>New Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia adopted, upholding MAS campaign promise</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>Morales wins second presidential election, retaining immense popularity and earning 64.22% of the vote</td>
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<td>2010 April</td>
<td>World Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba adopts the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth</td>
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<td>2010 May</td>
<td>Nationalization of electricity firms</td>
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<td>2010 December</td>
<td>Law 71 on the Rights of Mother Earth</td>
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<td>2011 January</td>
<td>Loan agreement signed with BNDES for $332 million, for a total project cost of $415 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011 May</td>
<td>Morales proposes the highway connecting Villa Tunari and San Ignacio de Moxos through the TIPNIS</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011 August</td>
<td>8th Indigenous March from TIPNIS to La Paz begins</td>
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<td>2011 September</td>
<td>Violent oppression of protestors by police force at Chaparina</td>
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<td>2011 October</td>
<td>Morales signs Law 180, effectively banning TIPNIS highway construction and deeming area “untouchable”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011 December</td>
<td>CIDOB and CONAMAQ split from Unity Pact, internal divisions deepen in each organization</td>
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<td>2011 December</td>
<td>Countermarch from CONISUR</td>
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<td>2012 January</td>
<td>Indigenous leaders form own voting bloc, splitting with the MAS</td>
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<td>2012 February</td>
<td>Law 222 dictates the implementation of a consultation process for development in the TIPNIS</td>
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<td>2012 April</td>
<td>Ninth Indigenous March</td>
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<td>2012 April</td>
<td>Brazil withdraws highway project financing, third election of Evo Morales</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>2012 May</td>
<td>Morales clears way for a fourth term; ruling states that term served under old Constitution does not count towards new term limits</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012 July–December</td>
<td>Consultation occurs, bringing immense criticism</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012 October</td>
<td>Law 300: Framework Law of Mother Earth and Integral Development for Living Well</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development (USAID) expelled</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Morales wins third presidential election with 61.36% of votes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Constitutional referendum on legality of a fourth term for Morales loses, 51%–49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017 August</td>
<td>Repeal of Law 180, replaced by Law 969 opening the way for the development project in the TIPNIS once more</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017 November</td>
<td>The Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal abolishes term limits for all elected officials, paving the way for Morales to run for a fourth term</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017 November</td>
<td>International Tribunal on the Rights of Nature visits Bolivia</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019 October</td>
<td>Morales ousted as a result of election audit by the Organization of American States</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>MAS democratically retains majority in new election with victory by Luis Arce and David Choquehuanca, winning 55.1% of the vote</td>
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