



CrossCurrents

NEWSLETTER OF THE WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA • MARCH 2006



LATIN AMERICAN ELECTIONS

MAS Victory in Bolivia Signifies
Mandate for Change..... 2

Venezuela's National Assembly
Elections: No Contest 4

Supporting Democracy in
Election Outcomes..... 6

Snapshots: Upcoming Elections..6

WOLA Activities..... 8

U.S. Insecurity in Latin America: “Radical Populism”

By William M. LeoGrande

Over the past decade, Latin America has experienced the rise of populist and leftist political movements, ranging from the radicalism of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela to the sedate socialism of Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet in Chile. What these movements have in common is a political appeal to poor and working-class Latin Americans whose lives have not been improved by the transition to democracy and the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies.

From 1996 to 2004, Latin America's GDP rose at an average annual rate of just 2.6 percent (1 percent per capita). The urban unemployment rate rose from 9.4 percent to 10 percent, leaving 43 percent of 500 million people living in poverty, 19 percent of them in extreme poverty. These numbers have declined only marginally since 1990 and not at all since 1997. Moreover, the total number of poor and extremely poor Latin Americans has risen by 10 percent since 1990. Income inequality is worse in Latin America than in any other region and is increasing.¹

In opinion polls and at the ballot box, Latin Americans have been registering their disgust with corrupt and incompetent government, notably with a political class that seems most interested in self-enrichment. The 2004 *Latinobarómetro* poll found that 71 percent of Latin Americans agreed with the statement, “The country is governed for the benefit of powerful interests,” with majorities in every country agreeing.²

These disgruntled citizens have been electing left-populist politicians who fault neo-liberal economic policies for slow growth, no improvement in poverty rates, and sparse investment in human capital through health and education. The more moderate of these critics have called simply for new policies within the framework of existing institutions. The more radical have called for the transformation of those institutions. [...]

At this writing, populist leader Evo Morales has won the presidency in Bolivia, Socialist Michelle Bachelet will take office as President of Chile, and leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador leads in the polls as the 2006 Mexican electoral campaign gets underway.

Does this new left-populist political trajectory in Latin America represent a threat to the United States? In his 2004 posture statement,

— continued on page 10

Cover photo courtesy of AP Images
All uncredited photos are from WOLA's archives.

William M. LeoGrande is dean of the School of Public Affairs, American University, Washington DC and Vice Chair of the WOLA Board

WOLA Board of Directors

Alex Wilde, Chair
Ford Foundation

William LeoGrande, Vice-Chair
Dean and Professor, Department of
Government, American University

Richard Erstad, Secretary/Treasurer
Director, Latin America, American Friends
Service Committee

Martín Coria
Interim Director, Social and Economic
Development, Church World Service

Charles Currie, SJ
President, Association of Jesuit Colleges
and Universities

Benjamin Davis
Regional Program Director, Solidarity Center,
AFL-CIO

Marie Dennis
Director, Maryknoll Office for Global
Concerns

Ralph Fine
Attorney

Kathy Gille
Former Senior Advisor to the Democratic
Whip, U.S. House of Representatives

Louis W. Goodman
Dean, School of Intl. Service, American
University

Franklin Knight
Professor, Dept. of History, Johns Hopkins
University

Gabriela Lemus
Director of Policy and Legislation, League of
United Latin American Citizens

Danuta Lockett
Senior Advisor, Victims of Torture Fund

Michael Maggio
Attorney, Maggio & Kattar

Cynthia McClintock
Professor of Political Science and International
Affairs, The George Washington University

Cecilia Muñoz
VP of Research, Advocacy, and Legislation,
National Council of La Raza

Joy Olson
Executive Director, Washington Office on
Latin America

Arturo Porzecanski
Professor, School of International Service,
American University

Greg Ratliff
Senior Fellow, Aspen Institute

Margaret Roggensack
Attorney

Silvia Wilhelm
Founder and Director, Puentes Cubanos



MAS Victory in Bolivia Signifies Mandate for Change

by Jeffrey Vogt, WOLA Senior Associate

Barefoot and clad in a replica of priestly ceremonial vestments, Evo Morales was recognized as the indigenous leader of Bolivia at a ceremony in the ancient pre-Incan ruins of Tiwanaku. The January 21 ceremony was attended by *mallkus* (Aymara leaders), thousands of well-wishers and the international press. On the next day, with hand on heart and fist held high, Evo Morales was inaugurated as President of Bolivia. Tens of thousands of miners, campesinos and coca farmers danced outside the presidential palace, waving the wipala flag, a symbol of indigenous unity. Now, with public expectations high, the former coca growers' union leader and congressman faces the difficult work of governing a complex and divided country.

The election of President Morales in December 2005 concluded a constitutional process sparked by President Carlos Mesa's resignation last June, when a series of popular demonstrations and debilitating strikes over the disposition of Bolivia's natural gas reserves brought the country to a standstill. The race between Evo Morales and his main opponent, Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga, to succeed an interim president, was widely expected to be close. Instead, President Morales secured an electoral victory that was historic for several reasons.

An Aymara, President Morales is the first indigenous leader to govern the country, where more than 62% of the people identify themselves as indigenous. And, 'Evo' has made it a priority of the new government to reflect that demographic, ensuring the participation of indigenous representatives in key positions. For example, the new Foreign Minister is David Choquehuanaca, an Aymara leader. Additionally, no president since the return to democracy in 1982

has enjoyed such an overwhelming mandate—54%—made possible by broad-based support both in terms of geography and class.¹ In fact, support for ‘Evo’ reached 33% in Santa Cruz, a wealthier, opposition stronghold, and middle class voters made up a large percentage of his overall support in Bolivia.

Importantly, President Morales’ victory also signaled rejection of the political, economic and social policies of the post-dictatorship governments, which failed to bring significant, comprehensive development to the country. Indeed, after more than 20 years of corruption and dutiful adherence to the Washington Consensus – shorthand for policies based on economic macro-stabilization, liberalization (market deregulation and lower tariff barriers) and privatization – Bolivia remains the poorest country in Latin America. At least 65% of the population still lives below the poverty line, the majority of them indigenous people living outside Bolivia’s cities.² Also, according to official estimates, 9.5% of urban-dwellers are unemployed.³ To turn the situation around, President Morales plans to reinsert the state into economic and social policymaking and to direct the government’s income from the extraction of natural gas reserves toward development projects, public services (health, education, utilities) and credit for small businesses and rural producers.

His election also signals a challenge to current U.S. drug policy. President Morales

government has taken a “wait and see” approach toward the government’s coca policy; however, there is no doubt that this policy and the U.S. response will color the relationship between the two nations.

Difficult domestic challenges lie ahead. President Morales will have to balance many competing and at times contradictory demands, from the right and the left, the poor and the middle class. Internationally, ‘Evo’ has already begun to reach out to neighbors in South America, to Europe, to South Africa and to China for political and economic support. He has also used a presidential tour to calm international



No president since the return to democracy in 1982 has enjoyed such an overwhelming mandate—54%—made possible by broad-based support both in terms of geography and class.

and his supporters have championed the right of Bolivians to grow coca leaves for domestic consumption, while proclaiming zero tolerance for cocaine trafficking. Many U.S. policymakers are uneasy at the thought of state-approved coca production in the Andes. However, the long-term failure of U.S. drug policy in Bolivia, aimed until quite recently at eliminating coca growing, had provoked profound resentment among Bolivians, with deep echoes at the polls. To date, the U.S.

investors’ nerves concerning his plans to nationalize the hydrocarbons sector, whereby he dispelled fears of expropriation and instead emphasized public-private partnerships.

Bolivia’s relationship with the U.S. is likely to be the most difficult challenge for President Morales’ government. While the State Department has so far demonstrated a willingness to work with the new government, other signals

—continued on page 11

Venezuela's National Assembly Elections: No Contest

by John Walsh, WOLA Senior Associate

As 2005 drew to a close, Venezuela's political polarization persisted, but with a dramatic twist. Just before the December 4 National Assembly elections, the main opposition parties pulled out of the contest. President Hugo Chávez's Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) and five allied parties then won all 167 seats in the country's unicameral legislature. Opposition parties now find themselves without any representation in that body. The new lawmakers began the first session of their five-year term in January 2006. President Chávez will himself stand for re-election in December 2006.

How did *chavismo* achieve such thorough control of the legislature? To be sure, the MVR was confident of major gains. Opposition forces were still reeling from the failed bid to oust Chávez in the August 2004 recall referendum. Although united in their animosity toward Chávez, the opposition parties have offered little in the way of alternative visions, focusing instead on criticizing Chávez and attacking the credibility of the country's electoral institutions.

could draw on the support of as many as 40 percent of the voters. Even given their ongoing failure to articulate an appealing alternative to *chavismo*, opposition leaders could have anticipated capturing at least 20 to 25 percent of the vote in the December elections.

That chance was lost when the main opposition parties withdrew from the contest, and urged their supporters to boycott the vote. The last-minute boycott came as a shock, since negotiations brokered by the Organization of American States (OAS) between the opposition parties and the pro-Chávez National Electoral Council (CNE) had successfully addressed the opposition's chief concerns, relating to procedural transparency and ballot secrecy. Shortly after giving their commitment to participate as a result of the successful negotiations, the main opposition parties, beginning with Democratic Action (AD), announced their boycott.

Only 25 percent of registered voters cast their ballots on December 4, well below the 56 percent turnout in the year 2000 National Assembly

By conceding total control of the National Assembly, opposition leaders left their supporters completely bereft of representation in the legislature.

By contrast, Chávez has continued to ride high in public opinion polls, benefiting from surging oil revenues and the popularity of the social programs known as "missions." And, by utilizing balloting strategies that violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the country's proportional representation electoral rules, the MVR and allies aimed to translate an expected majority of the vote into a super-majority in the new legislature.

But even though a clear-cut win for *chavismo* was widely expected, the opposition was by no means a negligible force, with past votes and numerous surveys suggesting that the opposition


elections. Apathy in the face of a desultory campaign, and the understandable perception (even before the boycott) that the results were a foregone conclusion, were important factors in the low election-day turnout. But opposition distrust of the CNE, and the last-minute withdrawal itself, also depressed turnout, depriving Chávez and his allies the additional political boost that massive participation would have bestowed.

While Chávez and the MVR were stung by the low turnout, the parties that led the boycott also suffered severe setbacks. If the opposition sought to throw the legitimacy of the vote into doubt,

they failed. In their preliminary reports, OAS and European Union (EU) election observers noted numerous problems, but did not call into question the process or the results. By conceding total control of the National Assembly to the MVR and allied parties, opposition leaders left their supporters completely bereft of representation in the national legislature. Even without counting its allies in the National Assembly, the MVR now holds the super-majority (two-thirds of seats) required to amend the Constitution.

As a bid for international solidarity, the boycott backfired badly because opposition party leaders left the appearance, at least, of having negotiated in bad faith. In their preliminary report, the EU observers noted that the “CNE demonstrated a clear willingness to meet the demands of the opposition parties,” and the

EU therefore “took note with surprise” of the withdrawal just days before the vote. OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza explained that the opposition had “assured us that they would not withdraw from the process if certain conditions were met. These were met, and despite this, they withdrew.” Insulza added that “if the path of abstention is chosen, then one cannot complain that the entire parliament is in the hands of one’s political adversary.”

It remains to be seen just how the MVR and its allies will use their control of the legislature, and how the opposition will approach the presidential elections slated for December 2006. What is clear is that Venezuela’s polarization and zero-sum politics persist, and that a national consensus on the fundamental questions of governance is not at hand. 

New Publications



- ▷ **Erasing the Lines: Trends in U.S. military programs with Latin America**, a joint publication from WOLA, the Latin America Working Group Education Fund and the Center for International Policy, December 2005. Also available in Spanish. This report is a study of current U.S. military assistance in Latin America, and it highlights several disturbing recent trends. Taken together, they paint a troubling picture: the lines separating military and civilian governance roles, firmly drawn by many Latin American governments after decades of conflict and military dictatorships, are being erased both in U.S. policy and in the region.

- ▷ **El Salvador Briefing Packet**, December 2005, created for a delegation to El Salvador in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the murders of four American churchwomen by security forces during that country’s internal conflict. The packet explains the events leading up to the brutal murders of Dorothy Kazel (an Ursuline Sister), Jean Donovan (a lay missionary), and Maura Clark and Ita Ford (both Maryknoll Sisters). It also presents a concise historical overview of the war and the first years of peace.

Supporting Democracy in Election Outcomes

By Geoff Thale, WOLA Program Director

Elections in more than a dozen countries in Latin America are bringing change to the region, and challenges for the Bush Administration's approach to Latin America. The electoral process in Latin America is bringing to the fore leaders who do not always share U.S. economic and political priorities.

At the end of November, voters in Honduras selected a new president. Over a 6-week span in December 2005–January 2006, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez's electoral coalition won every seat in Venezuela's National Assembly, Bolivian indigenous leader Evo Morales won his country's presidency by a huge margin, and Socialist Michelle Bachelet became the first woman elected to the presidency of Chile.

Overall, the leaders who are coming to power are doing so democratically and with popular mandates. Most of these leaders and their parties generally reject the "Washington Consensus"—the set of trade and market-oriented economic principles that guided the mostly center-right governments that dominated Latin America in the 1990s. Leaders' recent victories reflect a widespread desire for a new approach that will spread the benefits of growth more widely.

HAITI – René Préval is President-elect of Haiti now that election officials have determined that his electoral lead was sufficient to declare him the country's next chief of state. Organizational and security problems had delayed the electoral process and many observers believe that the current interim government is hostile to Préval. In spite of the successful elections, the danger for Haiti is that its lingering political crisis will remain unsolved because the international community will be tempted to abandon the country. Haiti requires sustained multi-lateral engagement and support to survive.

EL SALVADOR – Municipal and parliamentary elections take place in El Salvador in March. The party of the former rebels, the FMLN, has done well in previous municipal and Assembly elections. U.S. State Department officials warned Salvadoran voters in the 2004 presidential elections that an FMLN victory might jeopardize U.S.-Salvadoran relations. A number of FMLN party dissidents have joined forces to run center-left tickets in some cities and districts. There have been charges the electoral tribunal is manipulating the rules to exclude the FMLN dissidents.

Over a 6-week span, Venezuelan President **Hugo Chávez**'s electoral coalition won every seat in Venezuela's National Assembly, Bolivian indigenous leader **Evo Morales** won his country's presidency by a huge margin, and Socialist **Michelle Bachelet** became the first woman elected to the presidency of Chile.

Upcoming Elections— a Chronological Snapshot

COSTA RICA – As of this writing, voting tabulations are shifting daily in the hand count for Costa Rica's two presidential front-runners, former President and Nobel Peace Laureate Óscar Arias and progressive economist and congressman Ottón Solís. The candidates mainly differ over the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which Arias supports and Solís finds flawed.

PERU – Presidential elections take place in April. At the time of publication, no candidate is considered likely to win outright in the first round. The electoral landscape could look very different by April, and Peruvian opinion polls tend to under-represent rural voters, but the leading contenders appear to be center-right former congresswoman Lourdes Flores Nano and nationalist ex-army officer Ollanta Humala, who faces credible accusations of responsibility for severe human rights violations. Humala briefly surged ahead in the polls in early 2006, but then dropped back behind Flores Nano.

Most of these leaders and their parties generally reject the “Washington Consensus”—the set of trade and market-oriented economic principles that guided the mostly center-right governments that dominated Latin America in the 1990s.

COLOMBIA – Incumbent President Álvaro Uribe is running again, having succeeded in amending the constitution to permit a second term. While Colombia’s internal armed conflict still rages and the country’s human rights and humanitarian situation remains the gravest in the region, Uribe is widely credited with improving security and pushing the guerrillas back into their rural strongholds. As a result, in May the voters are widely expected to reward Uribe, a staunch U.S. ally, with four more years.

MEXICO – Presidential elections in Mexico pit current favorite Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a populist who recently resigned as mayor of Mexico City, against two more traditional politicians: Roberto Madrazo, a “dinosaur” of the PRI party that ruled Mexico for seven decades, and Felipe Calderón, of the conservative and business-friendly PAN. Each candidate has a shot at winning, and each promises to take Mexico down a very different path after Mexicans go to the polls in July.

BRAZIL – Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva will seek a second term as President of Brazil in the October elections. Lula is tarnished by corruption scandals that have led to the expulsion or resignation of key leaders of his Workers’ Party (PT) and has been criticized from within the PT and civil society for failing to deliver on key economic and social reforms that were the cornerstones of his 2002 campaign. Although Lula remains a strong, viable candidate, he will no doubt contend with centrist São Paulo mayor José Serra in a second round.


ECUADOR – In October, Ecuadorians will vote to elect a successor to interim President Alfredo Palacios. Palacios took office in April 2005 when the Congress ousted then-president Lucio Gutiérrez over his unconstitutional manipulations of the Supreme Court. There are no clear frontrunners yet. The likelihood of multiple candidates on both the left and right suggests that a first-round win is

unlikely and that candidates will be jockeying to form alliances across disparate parties in order to deliver votes in the second round.

NICARAGUA – In November, Sandinista candidate and former President Daniel Ortega will face off against a protégé of former President (and convicted felon) Arnoldo Alemán. This election may be fraught with difficulty. The race will likely include a dissident Sandinista candidate, and a dissident from Alemán’s coalition. The dissident candidates fear that their mainstream party rivals will unfairly manipulate the electoral process. Many observers fear that U.S. officials will seek to communicate U.S. hostility toward Daniel Ortega to the Nicaraguan electorate.

VENEZUELA – President Hugo Chávez will stand for re-election in December 2006. The major opposition parties boycotted Venezuela’s recent legislative elections (see article on page 4), and the country’s politics remain fiercely polarized. The electoral process is likely to be tense.

The U.S. Challenge

The challenge for the United States will be to engage in constructive dialogue with these governments, recognizing that their positions reflect popular sentiment in the region. Policy disagreements over trade, control of resources, and development priorities can be managed, and the U.S. would be wise to avoid political polarization with the region. On another note, the human rights community needs to continue to monitor democratic processes, with concern for potential authoritarian approaches from Latin American leaders. 

Washington Policy Work

- ▷ The House International Relations Committee's Western Hemisphere Subcommittee in November marked up a resolution that expresses sympathy on behalf of the U.S. Congress for the families of the young women murdered in Chihuahua, Mexico and encourages increased U.S. involvement in bringing an end to these crimes. H Con Res 90 was drafted with the help of WOLA staff and introduced by Congresswoman Hilda Solis (D-CA). The legislation currently has 135 co-sponsors. The *El Paso Times* and Mexican media reported the story.
- ▷ In mid-November, WOLA Senior Associate John Walsh was called to testify on the state of democracy in Venezuela before the House International Relations Committee's Western Hemisphere Subcommittee. Mr. Walsh was a voice of moderation during the hearing, calling for a nuanced understanding of the complex issues at play in Venezuela and greater dialogue between that country and the U.S.
- ▷ At a press conference in mid-December WOLA released a new report, "Erasing the Lines: Trends in U.S. Military Programs with Latin America," in conjunction with the Center for International Policy (CIP) and the Latin America Working Group Education Fund (LAWGEF). The report analyzes current U.S. military assistance in Latin America and highlights several disturbing trends, including a central concern that the lines separating military and civilian governance roles are being erased both in U.S. policy and in the region. The report was covered widely by media in the U.S., including the Associated Press, *New York Times*, Reuters, NPR and *El Nuevo Herald*, as well as newspapers in Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala.
- ▷ Senior Associate Jeff Vogt organized and moderated a congressional briefing, sponsored by Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), on the Andean Free Trade Agreement. The standing-room-only briefing was attended by dozens of congressional staff members as well as representatives of each of the Andean governments. The event, which was also reported in the *Miami Herald*, raised concerns about the negotiations and the potential impact of the agreement on public health, rural employment, drugs and labor rights.
- ▷ WOLA continues to play a key role in raising awareness and concerns about the brutal murders of women in Guatemala. In November, WOLA Associate Adriana Beltrán met with various Guatemalan government officials during their respective visits to Washington DC, including Marta Altolaquirre, then Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gabriela Nuñez, head of the Presidential Office for Women, and First Lady of Guatemala Wendy Berger. In addition, WOLA

circulated an educational memo to key congressional offices on this issue. Ms. Beltrán also participated in a one-hour online discussion sponsored by Amnesty International and was quoted in a *New York Times* article on the murders of women in Guatemala.

- ▷ WOLA, CIP and the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) held a Hill briefing on Luis Posada Carriles, a Cuban exile terrorist being detained in the United States on the minor charge of illegal entry, despite massive declassified CIA and FBI evidence that Posada Carriles orchestrated the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner. Venezuela is requesting Posada Carriles' extradition to face terrorism charges. Our briefing pointed to the obvious contradictions in the U.S. stand against terrorism – here the U.S. asks other governments not to shelter terrorists while at the same time it allows Posada Carriles to stay in the U.S. and thereby avoid prosecution in Venezuela.

"Outside the Beltway" Policy Work

- ▷ In December, WOLA spearheaded "An Open Letter to the People of Chile" signed by 24 U.S.-based NGOs calling for the support of the Chilean public in efforts to bring the former president of Peru, Alberto Fujimori, to justice for his crimes. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) collaborated on the project. The letter enjoyed coverage in many major news outlets in Chile and Peru.
- ▷ WOLA participated in an all-day special briefing at the U.S. Southern Command's Miami headquarters in February. The session included a two-hour meeting with General Bantz J. Craddock, the commander of SouthCom. WOLA and other NGOs were briefed about U.S. military programs in Latin America and then were able to share their concerns and ask detailed questions about SouthCom's activities in the region.
- ▷ On November 21-22, John Walsh participated in the 2nd annual meeting of the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), hosted by the Beckley Foundation in London. WOLA is a founding member of the IDPC, a network of NGOs dedicated to the promotion of evidence-based drug control policies.
- ▷ Laurie Freeman was a guest speaker about the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua at American University and at the University of North Carolina's Law School, where she emphasized the lack of adequate investigation and prosecution of these crimes. Freeman also spoke at a rally organized by Amnesty International USA to *End Femicide in Mexico* in Washington DC. She addressed the negligence and poor investigation techniques of Mexico's local authorities in resolving the crimes against women.

Presenting Latin American Voices

- ▷ In October, WOLA supported the visit of Ernesto Bardales, the coordinator of a Honduran youth violence prevention group, to appear at sessions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). In addition to setting up press interviews and accompanying him on visits with policymakers, we arranged a series of meetings for Bardales with U.S. groups that work on gang issues, including *Homies Unidos*, *Barrios Unidos* and *Sin Fronteras*. Bardales, along with other representatives of Central American human rights and youth violence organizations, participated in a roundtable discussion organized by WOLA, CEJIL, and the Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF) covering Central American anti-gang initiatives and human rights issues.
- ▷ As part of our continued work to encourage the extradition of former Peruvian president Fujimori to Peru, WOLA co-hosted a George Washington University Andean Seminar entitled, “Extraditing Fujimori,” featuring Sofia Macher, a former member of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Lisa Magerrell, a Senior Associate with the International Center for Transitional Justice, and José Miguel Vivanco of Human Rights Watch.
- ▷ Mr. Vogt was also in Bolivia in the days leading up to the presidential election and had the opportunity to interview several commentators and senior officials within the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS). Mr. Vogt observed the election process and discussed results with the mayor of La Paz. Since his return, Mr. Vogt has been frequently interviewed and quoted in national and international press on the elections. He has also met with senior officials in the State Department to assess their reaction to the elections and how they may respond to the policies put forth under a MAS government.
- ▷ WOLA Associates Laurie Freeman and Adriana Beltrán traveled to Mexico and Guatemala to conduct research on violence against women. They looked into local law enforcement practices for preventing and prosecuting the murders of women. In both countries, our Associates met with the offices of the Attorneys General, local, state, and federal police, legislators, and local and international human rights organizations.
- ▷ Executive Director Joy Olson traveled to Venezuela in November to speak at a conference, “Police for Inclusive Democracy” organized by the civil society group *Red de Apoyo*. The conference focused on human rights and policing and was attended by more than 100 police officers from various Latin American countries. Ms. Olson emphasized the importance of distinguishing between military and policing roles. The conference was an opportunity to directly engage police officers in conversation and an excellent learning experience for WOLA.

WOLA in Latin America

- ▷ The Spanish version of WOLA’s new book, *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy*, received a warm welcome in Peru during its release in November at the *Instituto de Defensa Legal* (IDL). John Walsh and Senior Fellow Coletta Youngers presented the book’s findings to a packed audience at an event that also featured well-known Peruvian drug policy analysts. During their trip, Walsh and Youngers also met with Peruvian government officials, including President Toledo, and members of Peruvian civil society. They also placed an op-ed in *La República*, a major Peruvian daily, critiquing U.S. drug control policy in Peru and calling for more effective, humane solutions to the problem of drug consumption.
- ▷ In November, Jeff Vogt attended the Fourth Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina and the parallel Third People’s Summit, where he spoke on the issue of U.S. trade policy in Latin America. The official Summit, intended to unify the region on issues of development, employment and good governance, was largely overshadowed by deep disagreement on the future of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).
- ▷ In October, Geoff Thale traveled to Mexico City to participate in a meeting organized by *El Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México* (ITAM). Coming out of this meeting, WOLA agreed to participate in a comparative study headed by the ITAM, which focuses on youth gang violence in Central America, Mexico, and the U.S. The study seeks to determine the root causes of youth gang violence among Central American groups and their social and political implications from a domestic as well as a transnational standpoint.

“Radical Populism”

continued from the front page

Gen. James T. Hill, head of the U.S. Southern Command, defined the growth of “radical populism” as an emerging security threat because of the anti-American appeals of populist leaders.

During a trip to Latin America last August, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld also focused on the danger that populism, most especially Hugo Chávez’s version, poses for hemispheric democracy. “A guy who seemed like a comic figure a year ago is turning into a real strategic menace,” said a senior Defense Department official traveling with Rumsfeld. At the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, a recent monograph on radical populism takes as a given that populists are antidemocratic, anti-American, and a threat to U.S. security interests. It recommends that Washington work to preempt their coming to power, and be prepared to deal militarily with any “burst of populist turbulence.”³

Populists may or may not pose a threat to domestic democratic institutions, and they may or may not be hostile to the United States. While Hugo Chávez’s actions might call into question his commitment to democratic norms, he and all the other left populist leaders who have come to power in Latin America in the past decade have done so through democratic elections. The most serious threat to constitutional democracy in Venezuela was mounted not by Chávez, but by his opponents who orchestrated a short-lived military coup in 2002—a coup Washington welcomed.

Populists in power may not please the United States, especially because of their skepticism concerning the value of unfettered markets and free trade. Their rhetoric will sometimes offend U.S. policymakers, especially when they blame all their nation’s problems on U.S. imperialism. But they are a product of democratic contestation. They are expressing and responding to the views of their constituents, who increasingly form a majority. For Washington, tolerating governments and political movements in Latin America with whom it disagrees is the price of democracy.

The antidote to radical populism is honest, responsive government and economic policies that improve living standards and provide opportunity to all social classes. Whereas the United States has tended to see populist movements as a threat, Latin Americans identify poverty and social exclusion as the real threat. The suppression of

populist demands, now being articulated for the most part nonviolently through existing political institutions, runs the risk of sparking armed conflicts. That was the lesson in Central America during the 1970s: if nonviolent avenues are closed to protest, violent ones will open.

Bringing about reforms that would make Latin American governments relatively immune to radical or revolutionary challenge has been an aim of U.S. policy, with ups and downs, since the Alliance for Progress in the early 1960s. But it has also been an elusive goal. Historically, U.S. policymakers have found it easier to provide military assistance to suppress radical social movements than to address the underlying social, economic, and political problems that give rise to them. In the 1960s and 1970s, military aid programs created large, resource-rich military institutions in countries where civilian institutions were weak, thus facilitating the establishment of military authoritarian regimes.

Nontraditional “threats” like drug trafficking, crime, and radical populism arise from the same social, economic, and political failings that plagued Latin America half a century ago. Yet Washington is once again seeking a quick cure by deploying military hardware and advisers to ameliorate the symptoms of social and political dysfunction. Not only will this reprise of mistaken priorities fail to address these problems, militarizing the response once again puts Latin American democracy at risk. Historically, far more democratic governments in the hemisphere have been overthrown by their own armed forces than by insurgents, drug traffickers, and radical populists combined. 🇺🇸

This excerpt has been reprinted with permission from the *World Policy Journal*: Winter 2005–2006 (p.32–33)

- 1 United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2004-2005, Table A-1; United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Social Panorama of Latin America*.
- 2 *Latinobarómetro 2004: A Decade of Measurements*, p. 17
- 3 Steve C. Ropp, *The Strategic Implications of the Rise of Populism in Europe and South America*, (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, June 2005).



Some within the Defense Department retain a cold-war mindset, seeing in Mr. Morales a second coming of Che Guevara.


Coca Sí, Cocaína No!

Bolivia

—continued from page 3

from within the administration are less positive. Some within the Defense Department retain a cold-war mindset, seeing in Mr. Morales a second coming of Che Guevara.

To date, U.S. trade officials seem unwilling to renew trade preferences with Bolivia, due to expire in December 2006, and show no signs of flexibility in trade talks with the neighboring Andean nations. The consequences are likely to be thousands of job losses in a country where formal employment is already scarce. Still others have

warned that the near \$600 million in Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) development funds slated for Bolivia could be at risk if Mr. Morales fails to adopt the same economic policies that he rejected as part of his campaign. The year ahead promises to be a complicated one. 

- 1 For 2005 elections statistics, consult the website of the National Election Court of Bolivia at <http://www.cne.org.bo>.
- 2 State Department, Country Report on Human Rights Practices—Bolivia (Feb 2005).
- 3 See Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT), *Panorama Laboral 2005* (2006), p. 91 (data for 2003). However, of those considered employed, 60–65% are employed in the informal economy, meaning there is no formal employer-employee relationship.

We need your support!

Yes, I want to contribute to WOLA's work to advance human rights, democracy and social justice in Latin America. Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation of:

☐ \$200 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$75 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$35 ☐ \$_____ other _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Fax _____ E-mail _____

☐ Please send me information about planned giving for WOLA.

WOLA is a 501(c)3 charitable organization. Please make checks payable to WOLA and send to: 1630 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20009

You may also contribute through our website www.wola.org. **Thank you!**

WOLA Staff

Joy Olson

Executive Director

Geoff Thale

Director of Programs

Sally Glass

Communications Director

Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli

Senior Associate for Colombia and Haiti

Jeff Vogt

Senior Associate for Rights and Development

John Walsh

Senior Associate for the Andes and Drug Policy

Adriana Beltrán

Associate for Guatemala and
Violence Against Women

Laurie Freeman

Associate for Mexico and Security

Elsa Falkenburger

Program Officer for Cuba and Gangs

Joel Fyke

Program Assistant for Central America, Brazil, and
Rights and Development

Katie Malouf

Program Assistant for the
Andes and Security

Kristel Muciño

Intern Coordinator and
Program Assistant for Mexico

Lori Piccolo

Associate for Financial Development

Ana Paula Duarte

Development Assistant

Jay Schwartz

Operations and Finance Manager

Rachel Neild

Senior Fellow

Coletta Youngers

Senior Fellow

George Withers

Senior Fellow

**CrossCurrents**

Vol. 8, No. 1 • March 2006

ISSN 1059-6402

Edited by Sally Glass

UNCREDITED PHOTOS FROM WOLA ARCHIVES

Washington Office on Latin America
1630 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200
Washington DC 20009
Tel: 202.797.2171 • Fax: 202.797.2172
Email: wola@wola.org • Web: www.wola.org

**Washington Office on Latin America**

1630 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20009

LATIN AMERICAN **ELECTIONS** ISSUE