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Tactics of Political Violence in the 2019 Bolivian Crisis

Return of the Catastrophic Stalemate?[1]

Carwil Bjork-James
Vanderbilt University

Abstract

During Bolivia's 2019 political crisis, reactivated modes of political violence occurred within and alongside familiar forms of mass mobilization. In Bolivia's recent history, this period is most comparable to the 2006–2009 partisan conflict over constitutional reform and departmental autonomy known by the Gramscian term *empate catastrófico*, or catastrophic stalemate. Although there are many similarities between the two periods, both social movement and institutional norms limiting violence were weakened between the two, resulting in more rapid deployment of destructive tactics and deadlier violence by security forces. As Gramsci's model argues, greater deployment of force was no guarantee of political success in either crisis. This article examines three extraordinary and destructive tactics: partisan street clashes, sometimes involving firearms; arson attacks on electoral authorities, party offices, politicians' homes, and police stations; and mass shootings of demonstrators. I describe these three tactics as part of Bolivia's repertoire of contention—that is, as routinized forms of political action with commonly

[1] This article draws on ethnographic fieldwork supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the CUNY Graduate Center, and a National Science Foundation dissertation grant. The Ultimate Consequences database of lethal events in Bolivian political conflict was produced with the support of Vanderbilt University and a Mellon Digital Humanities Faculty Fellowship and is currently supported by a National Science Foundation grant. Chelsey Dyer, Emma Banks, and Nathan Frisch have been invaluable participants in the research team for Ultimate Consequences. The author thanks the anonymous reviewers and the editors for their feedback and suggestions.

understood meanings—and compare their use in both the 2006–2009 stalemate and the 2019 crisis. Quantitatively, I analyze the deadly violence in 2019 by drawing on Ultimate Consequences, a comprehensive database of nearly six hundred deaths in Bolivian political conflict since 1982. In the final weeks of Morales's presidency, violence between opposed civilian groups accounted for all four deaths, whereas several incidents of partisan street clashes involved potentially lethal force. Following Morales's ouster, however, the security forces became the central violent actor, perpetrating at least twenty-nine of the thirty-four violent deaths.

Keywords
Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), political violence, Jeanine Áñez, Antonio Gramsci, Bolivian politics, tactics, human rights, repression, partisan politics, Constituent Assembly, Evo Morales

Resumen

Durante la crisis política de 2019, se produjeron formas reactivadas de violencia política dentro y junto a formas familiares de movilización de masas. En la historia reciente de Bolivia, este período es comparable al conflicto partidario de 2006–2009 sobre la reforma constitucional y la autonomía departamental conocido por el término gramsciano de "empate catastrófico." Aunque hay muchas similitudes entre los dos periodos, tanto el movimiento social como las normas institucionales que limitan la violencia se debilitaron mutuamente, lo que dio lugar a un rápido despliegue de tácticas destructivas y a una violencia mortífera por parte de las fuerzas de seguridad. Como sostiene el modelo de Gramsci, un mayor despliegue de fuerza no fue garantía de éxito político en ninguna de las dos crisis. Este artículo examina tres tácticas extraordinarias y destructivas: enfrentamientos callejeros partidistas, a veces con armas de fuego; ataques incendiarios contra autoridades electorales, oficinas de partidos, domicilios de políticos y comisarías policiales; y tiroteos masivos contra manifestantes. Describo estas tres tácticas como parte del repertorio de contención de Bolivia —es decir, como formas rutinarias de acción política con significados comúnmente entendidos— y comparo su uso con el empate catastrófico de 2006–2009 y con la crisis de 2019. Cuantitativamente, analizo la violencia mortal de 2019 recurriendo a Últimas Consecuencias, una base de datos exhaustiva de casi seiscientas muertes en conflictos políticos bolivianos desde 1982. En las últimas semanas de la presidencia de Morales, la violencia entre grupos civiles opuestos fue responsable de cuatro muertes, mientras que varios incidentes

de enfrentamientos callejeros partidistas implicaron el uso fuerza potencialmente letal. Sin embargo, tras la destitución de Morales, las fuerzas de seguridad se convirtieron en el principal actor violento, perpetrando al menos veintinueve de las treinta y cuatro muertes violentas que se registraron.

Keywords
Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), violencia política, Jeanine Áñez, Antonio Gramsci, política boliviana, tácticas, derechos humanos, represión, política partidaria, Asamblea Constituyente, Evo Morales

In 2019, following highly disputed elections on October 20, President Evo Morales encountered new and challenging protests, which ultimately demanded his resignation. These twenty days echoed both the numerous episodes of mass protest in Bolivia's democratic history and the extreme partisan polarization of the so-called catastrophic stalemate from 2006 to 2009. In both cases, the Morales government and its challengers sought to assemble coalitions and to demonstrate their relative political strength through mass participation in rallies, marches, road blockades, and general strikes. Reactivated modes of political violence and property destruction occurred within and alongside these familiar forms of mass mobilization. Following a police mutiny, an unfavorable (but preliminary) electoral audit, and pressure from both the military high command and mass protests, Morales resigned his office on November 10, 2019. While police mutineers and military leaders had framed their actions as efforts to avoid bloodshed, violence dramatically escalated during the forty-eight-hour interregnum and two weeks of further protest that followed Morales's ouster and lasted until November 26.

The political crisis of 2019 was a moment of unusually damaging political violence for democratic Bolivia. Thirty-eight lives were lost during the crisis, a toll only exceeded by the September–October 2003 Gas War (with seventy deaths), though closely followed by the February 2003 tax protests (thirty-five deaths).[2] Polarization in the streets was accompanied by fractures in mass and social media narratives on the conflict and ultimately in published accounts of the period. Just as the often-polemical debate over whether the crisis was

[2] Quantitative figures on deaths provided in this article derive from the author's Ultimate Consequences database, described in greater detail below.

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rooted in electoral fraud or fundamentally a coup d'état shaped descriptions of the overall crisis (Ruiz Collantes and Cabezas), many accounts have focused exclusively on the violence of one of the contending parties to the exclusion of the other.[3] By writing systematically about each tactic as used by multiple actors, I hope to overcome one-eye-shut partisan narration of the political crisis while keeping attention on the genuine asymmetries in forms of political violence and destruction.

Between 2008 and 2013, I conducted fourteen months of fieldwork to document political upheavals through a combination of ethnographic, oral historical, and historical methods (Bjork-James 2020). I found that the tactics of protests used by social movements are part of a national language for expressing and enacting demands, what contentious politics scholars call a "repertoire of contention" (Tilly and Tarrow 49-74). For example, the *cabildo abierto*—a mass gathering in central plazas claiming the right to speak for a city or region—draws upon but modifies historical precedents dating to the break from Spanish rule. Revived by leftist grassroots movements during their 2000–2005 protests against neoliberalism, it became a core element of the movement for departmental autonomy. This repertoire channels outrage into a limited set of known tactics, draws on cultural referents, persists over time, may evolve in times of crisis (Tarrow), and allows tactics to diffuse across the political spectrum.

This article concerns three prominent (and destructive) tactics of 2019 in the Bolivian repertoire of contention: partisan street clashes, sometimes involving firearms; arson attacks on official buildings, party offices, and politicians' homes; and finally, mass shootings of demonstrators. My prior work has identified eleven forms of specifically "space-claiming" protest (Bjork-James 2020, 232); the three combative tactics examined here contribute to a wider picture of the Bolivian repertoire of contention. Organized groups of nonstate combative actors, *grupos de choque*, helped to articulate these actions, though I do not detail them systematically here.

The catastrophic stalemate of 2006 to 2009 is an important comparative touchstone for the 2019 crisis. In both cases, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) [Movement Toward Socialism] and its leftist grassroots supporters squared off against a fluctuating coalition of opponents in competing street

[3] For example, in *21 Días de Resistencia*, Brockmann concludes with the extraordinary statement that after the inauguration of Jeanine Áñez, "Esa noche ya todos pudimos dormir en paz" (585).

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mobilizations. Regional civic movements, departmental governments, and the *Comité Nacional de Defensa de la Democracia* (CONADE) [National Committee for the Defense of Democracy] offered an institutional framework for the opposition. The prolonged conflict nearly paralyzed the *Asamblea Constituyente* [Constituent Assembly] and threatened to render a new constitution inoperative in much of Bolivia's national territory. Meanwhile, dramatic acts of public aggression, humiliation, and violence caused lasting damage and raised the specter of more serious political disintegration.

However, as this article will show, the 2019 crisis was briefer, deadlier, and lacked some important restraints on violence and destruction present in the stalemate and the intervening years. As described in Section I, I adopt the contentious politics and Gramscian strategic frames to analyze these two political moments. Two sections summarizing the crises follow, revealing similarities in tactics but a much more rapid pace and considerably greater violence in 2019. Section IV considers the distinction between expressive and combative elements of the protest repertoire, which parallels the Gramscian distinction between the "moment of position" and the "moment of maneuver." My analysis of partisan street battles (Section V) shows greater willingness to directly confront opponents and a wider use of firearms in 2019. Arsons (Section VI), too, became more central to protest activities in 2019, used extensively by both sides. Finally, the interim military leadership and the Jeanine Áñez government ended restrictions on military deployments and lethal force against demonstrators (Section VII), enabling mass shootings in La Paz, Sacaba, and El Alto, as well as other lethal abuses.

Understanding the political choices involved and parties responsible for each tactic is vital for accountability in this violent period and for the prevention of future tragedies. In Section VIII, I quantitatively analyze the 2019 crisis, drawing on my comprehensive database of over 600 deaths in political conflict since 1982. Despite the variety of violent or destructive tactics, security forces were the principal perpetrators of killings. In Section IX, I attempt to explain the more rapid *tempo* with which combative and destructive tactics were deployed. Leadership decisions to prioritize direct confrontation over demonstrating broad popular support contributed to the human toll of the crisis. Ironically, as we will see, decisions to escalate by the civic movement in 2008 and by the Morales government and its allies in 2019 proved counterproductive. I close by discussing the prospects for accountability.

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I. Methods and Approach

Contentious politics scholars incorporate combative grassroots actions such as barricades and food riots into the same overarching framework as conventional social movement activities. It opens the door to scholarly study of socially disapproved tactics rather than disqualifying them as criminal or prepolitical. Conversely, the human rights framework is founded upon the drawing of boundaries between legitimate political expression and illegitimate abuses of others' rights (Tate 55-65, 118-122). There is necessarily a tension between an open-minded review of Bolivia's tactical repertoire and the (productively) judgmental attitude of those defending human rights. Combative protest traditions and beliefs in human rights, I would argue, are both part of Bolivia's political culture. It is precisely because Bolivians can generally expect not to be shot down while engaging in disruptive protest that the latter has become a form of mass participation in shaping the direction of the country.

I apply concepts from both the field of contentious politics and Marxist/Gramscian theories of history to understand the pacing and temporality of protest actions and political violence. Historians and sociologists of contentious politics draw great attention to the temporality of social movement actions: first, to the immediacy and felt acceleration of time during periods of mass participation (McAdam and Sewell; Zolberg), named "cycles of protest"; and second, to the alternation between these "moments of madness" and lengthy periods of stability. At least since Leon Trotsky, Marxists have been concerned with "the tempo of revolution," wherein alliances among social forces emerge in "a question not of decades, not of years, but of months" (Trotsky 586), and conversely with prolonged periods of historical stasis that delay hoped-for transformations. Antonio Gramsci explored the latter situation of a standoff between progressive and reactionary alliances each incapable of defeating the other, "an equilibrium of forces heading towards catastrophe" (219) in the *Prison Notebooks*. This notion resonates with perspectives on Bolivian history, portraying it as an enduring standoff between Indigenous and colonial coalitions (Rivera Cusicanqui; Hylton and Thomson), or between a national popular coalition and a capitalist state (Zavaleta Mercado).

Marxist theorist and Vice President Álvaro García Linera adopted a Gramscian framework to describe the task of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), the Bolivian socialist political party led by Evo Morales: to establish and consolidate a long-term hegemonic power block led by the

party. Yet in its first years, the Morales government faced an opposition that, though defeated in national elections, was entrenched in departmental and regional power structures and capable of grinding the constitutional reform process to a halt. García Linera used the term *empate catastrófico* to both describe the moment—"confrontation of two national political projects for the country, two perspectives for the country, each with a capacity for mobilization, attraction, and seduction of social forces"—and to prophesy its end: "This equilibrium might last weeks, months, years; but a moment will come when a breakthrough, a way out, is achieved" (García Linera 2008b, 26).[4]

Gramsci's model of revolutionary social change also invokes two alternate periods of activity: mass political organization (the war of position) and direct violent confrontation (the war of maneuver). Offering many precautions against premature violence, he urged, "The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organized and long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable" (Gramsci 185). The switch to confrontation, Gramsci warned, is fraught with risk; victory depends largely on political strength, not force. In the conclusion of this article, I will draw on this line of analysis to consider why contending political actors sometimes leaned towards prolonging these standoffs and sometimes sought to rapidly escalate them.

Finally, this article draws on the Ultimate Consequences database, a comprehensive record of deaths in Bolivian political struggle from 1982 to the present, compiled since 2015 by a research team led by the author (Bjork-James et al.). The database facilitates both quantitative research into patterns of protest and repression and qualitative and historical examination of deadly events. Numerous variables are coded for each death, and we create brief narrative descriptions of each event using journalistic, advocacy, and scholarly sources. We estimate there have been 630 to 675 deaths since October 1982. The database compiles 607 to 647 of these deaths, and Table 1 illustrates the wide variation in the level of political violence under different presidencies (Bjork-James 2022). Throughout the rest of this article, quantitative statements

[4] The term *empate catastrófico* derives from Gramsci's references to catastrophic equilibrium, and was applied to left–right (and West-East) standoffs in Bolivia as early as 2005 (Ramírez Gallegos and Stefanoni; García Linera 2008a).

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about deaths during this period (e.g., "there have been only two deadly protest arsons") are conclusions based on this dataset.[5]

Presidency	First day	Last day	Days in Office	Average deaths per year	Average state-perpetrator deaths per year	Deaths in the database	State-perpetrator deaths	State-victim deaths
Hernán Siles Zuazo	Oct. 10, 1982	Aug. 6, 1985	1,031	2.5	0.7	7	2	0
Víctor Paz Estenssoro	Aug. 6, 1985	Aug. 6, 1989	1,461	9.7	6.5	39	26	2
Jaime Paz Zamora	Aug. 6, 1989	Aug. 6, 1993	1,461	5.2	4.0	21	16	1
Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada	Aug. 6, 1993	Aug. 6, 1997	1,461	12.2	7.2	49	29	4
Hugo Banzer	Aug. 6, 1997	Aug. 7, 2001	1,462	27.7	9.0	111	36	17
Jorge Quiroga	Aug. 7, 2001	Aug. 6, 2002	364	31.1	17.0	31	17	4
Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada	Aug. 6, 2002	Oct. 17, 2003	437	121.1	84.4	145	101	23

[5] All queries and data tables referenced in this article are compiled in BSJ-Political-Violence.Rmd in the Ultimate Consequences package on GitHub, using the database as constituted on November 16, 2022. A copy of the database on that date is archived for reproducibility of the analysis. Access is currently available to researchers on request and will be incorporated into the forthcoming public release of the dataset. The queries, data tables, and code used to create them are published online as Bjork-James 2022 at https://ultimateconsequences.github.io/ultimate-consequences/BSJ-Political-Violence.html.

Carlos D. Mesa Gisbert	Oct. 17, 2003	June 9, 2005	601	11.5	1.8	19	3	9
Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé	June 9, 2005	Jan. 22, 2006	227	0.0	0.0	0	0	0
Evo Morales	Jan. 22, 2006	Nov. 10, 2019	5,040	9.8	2.5	136	34	10
Interim military rule	Nov. 10, 2019	Nov. 12, 2019	2	1,642.5	730.0	9	4	2
Jeanine Áñez	Nov. 12, 2019	Nov. 8, 2020	362	25.2	24.2	25	24	0
Luis Arce	Nov. 8, 2020		738	7.4	0.0	15	0	1
Totals			14,647	**Current total count:**		**607**	**292**	**73**
				Not included above:		Non-conflict accidents	17	
						Collateral conse-quences	5	
						Uncon-firmed deaths	18	

Table 1: Deaths by Presidency in the Post-1982 Democratic Era (excluding unconfirmed upper estimates and non-conflict-related accidents). Luis Arce's number of days in office was calculated the day this article was submitted
Source: Ultimate Consequences Database

With these three elements—protest tactics, competing coalitions, and violent loss of life—in mind, the next two sections present brief narrative accounts of the two crises that are the focus of this article.

II. A Chronological Account of the 2019 Crisis

Opposition to President Morales's reelection to a fourth term began well before 2019. Opponents narrowly defeated a February 2016 referendum to remove a constitutional limit on reelection, only to watch the *Tribunal Supremo Constitucional* (TSE) [Supreme Electoral Tribunal] authorize his run in November 2017. Polls showed that most Bolivians expected fraud in the 2019 vote, and most saw Morales's candidacy to be against the law (Chávez V.; European Union Election Expert Mission 3, 6). Opponents of his candidacy reactivated the *Comité Nacional de Defensa de la Democracia* (CONADE) [National Committee for the Defense of Democracy] and held *cabildos* pledging "to defend the vote and defeat whatever manifestation of fraud"[6] happened during the election ("Cabildo de La Paz aprueba").

On election night, electoral authorities issued a single preliminary count of 83.8 percent of the votes at 7:40 p.m., showing Morales ahead by 7.87 percent, and then paused updates for twenty-three hours. The margin between Morales and runner-up Carlos Mesa Gisbert rapidly trended toward a first-round MAS victory (requiring a 10 percent lead) once the count restarted (European Union Election Expert Mission 30-32). Confidence in the vote was shaken; as Pablo Solón, Morales's former UN Ambassador, observed, "Lack of confidence doesn't just come from the management of the Rapid Count, or lack of transparency, but rather has accumulated for years" (Solón). The opposition movement mobilized three weeks of mass protests "against fraud," which were mirrored by the president's supporters rallying "in defense of the vote." Still others, including prominent labor unions, urged Morales to step aside without embracing the claims of fraud, whereas a "women's parliament" protested both Morales and his opponents as *caudillos* bent on conflict. Morales agreed to a binding Organization of American States (OAS) audit of the election, while citizen sleuths pored over the publicly available ballot paper trail, claiming to find irregularities.

Rather than simply mobilize in separate and competing demonstrations, protesters often attempted to break up one another's blockades or to physically confront opponents. Four people were killed in protest-related clashes. Arsons occurred in unusually large numbers. The *Defensoría del Pueblo* counted 174 arrests through November 9, with just twenty-five still detained as of that date; 338 people were counted as wounded, including eight

[6] This and succeeding translations from Spanish to English are mine.

journalists and 11 police officers ("Defensoría del Pueblo reporta"; Defensoría del Pueblo 2019a, 2019b). Anti-Morales protesters reached out to the police and military for an alliance ("Camacho"; Imilla Zurda), and a police mutiny began on November 8 (Cuiza).

On November 10, Morales was further undercut by a preliminary report finding irregularities and faults in election integrity and recommending a revote (OEA)[7] and by news that his supporters had opened fire on a caravan of protesting miners (GIEI Bolivia 138-168). Significant organizational members of the MAS's leftist grassroots coalition, most notably the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (COB) [Bolivian Workers' Center], called for him to step aside, as did the military high command. Morales offered to compete in a run-off at 7 a.m. and resigned as president at 4:51 p.m. (Defensoría del Pueblo 2020, 56). Morales's resignation did not serve to resolve the crisis; rather, the level of violence dramatically escalated. Some opponents of Morales celebrated "the fall of a dictator"[8] and assaulted or burned the homes of MAS politicians. Simultaneously, a segment of Morales's supporters[9] engaged in direct attacks on police installations, public infrastructure, and political opponents, framing their acts as resistance to a military coup. On the evening of November 11, the Armed Forces commander issued an order for troops to deploy nationwide to restore order (Romero).

Jeanine Áñez, previously the second vice president of the Senate, claimed a place in the line of succession, participated in back-channel succession talks organized by the Roman Catholic Church, and was sworn in as president on November 12 (Kurmanaev and del Castillo). The legality of this maneuver remains subject to vigorous debate, and Áñez was convicted in June 2022 for illegally taking office (see Tribunal de Sentencia Anticorrupción Primero). Áñez put hard-liners in charge of the security forces: Arturo Murillo as Minister of

[7] Specifically, the OAS audit found "serious security flaws," "manipulation of the TREP [rapid count] system" by an unregistered server, invalid tally sheets and forged signatures, and alleged statistical anomalies in the vote totals. The team declared it "cannot validate the results of this election." (OEA 12-13).

[8] As in public statements by Eliane Capobianco—"una vez más Bolivia demostró su grandeza, su fuerza, su compromiso con la democracia, cayó otro Dictador" (Capobianco)—and Waldo Albarracín: "Se ha demostrado al mundo que sí es posible derrocar una dictadura mediante una lucha pacífica" (Noticias Caracol; Capobianco; Corzo et al. 324).

[9] In metropolitan La Paz/El Alto and Cochabamba, at least, a substantial number of people disenchanted with Morales but outraged by anti-Indigenous signals from the new Áñez government joined in post-ouster protests (Mamani Ramírez).

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Government, overseeing domestic policing; Luis Fernando López as Minister of Defense; and new commanders of the Armed Forces ("Jeanine Áñez"; Manetto).

Security forces then deployed greater lethal force against demonstrators, most dramatically against a march of *cocaleros* in Sacaba on November 15 and a prolonged blockade at the Senkata gas facility in El Alto on November 19. In both cases, security forces opened fire on large civilian crowds, wounding scores and ultimately killing at least ten in Sacaba and eleven in Senkata. Despite the dispersal of the Senkata blockade, protesters mounted blockades in increasing numbers, interrupting traffic at 102 points across all nine departments on November 20 ("Hay 102 puntos de bloqueo").

Preliminary talks between the Áñez government and pro-MAS social movements began on November 16. The MAS-IPSP-controlled[10] legislature passed a law to convene new elections without Morales, which Áñez signed into law on November 24. The Chapare coca growers lifted the last blockades on November 26. During the first two weeks following Morales's ouster, the Bolivian government detained between 848 and 1,275 people[11] (GIEI-Bolivia 89; Defensoría del Pueblo 2019a, 2019b), many of them survivors of extrajudicial executions. At least ninety-six prisoners were tortured or severely mistreated in La Paz department alone (ITEI). By January 2020, the Áñez government initiated prosecutions and investigations of more than one hundred MAS officials and supporters for supposed sedition or terrorism (Human Rights Watch; "Hay más de 100 exautoridades").

The presidency of Jeanine Áñez, nominally limited to ninety days by the constitution, ended up lasting 363 days. Due to the reconstitution of electoral authorities, general elections were first set for May 3, 2020, but were repeatedly pushed back amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2020, nationwide blockades at 130 locations by MAS-aligned social movements insisted on a firm date for elections. A resurgent MAS-IPSP, led by Luis Arce and David Choquehuanca, won the October 18, 2020, elections by an overwhelming margin: 55.1 percent to 28.8 percent. No significant violence accompanied right-wing protests of this outcome. Arce and Choquehuanca were sworn in on November 8, 2020.

[10] Movimiento al Socialismo-Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos (Movement for Socialism-Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples).

[11] Even the higher estimate, a total itemized by day by the *Defensoría del Pueblo*, appears to omit some detentions after the Senkata massacre.

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While the events of 2019 were dramatic, almost all of the protest tactics followed precedents from the political crisis that gripped Bolivia a decade prior.

III. A Brief Account of the Catastrophic Stalemate

From 2006 to 2009, political conflict focused on the drafting and approval process for a new constitution and opposing proposal for decentralization. Enacting a demand of protests in 2003 and 2005, a Constituent Assembly was elected and convened in mid-2006. A strong majority of assembly members, affiliated with the MAS and its allies, pledged to establish a new, plurinational Bolivia. Outnumbered in the Assembly, and without the presidency for the first time in two decades, the Bolivian right regrouped behind proposals for autonomous departmental governments detached from that constitutional framework. The narrative of a unified *media luna* (Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, and Tarija), led by a whiter and therefore ethnically distinct "Camba nation," has structured perceptions of this period, but most clashes actually pitted residents of the same department against one another.[12]

In the December 2006 *cabildos* that were held in six departmental capitals, the opposition vowed to ignore the future constitution. In late 2007, they tried to physically obstruct its passage in Sucre (Defensoría del Pueblo 2009; Carrasco Alurralde and Albó). Tensions mounted through 2008 as civic movements declared autonomy from the national government and held referenda in four eastern departments. The Morales government restrained its use of force, abandoning the city of Sucre after deadly confrontations ("Suman las muertes") and otherwise keeping security forces out of left–right street clashes.

Within and beyond these moments of crisis, organized groups of opposition protesters engaged in prolonged campaigns demanding full capital status for Sucre, opposing the work of the Constituent Assembly, and demanding or declaring the autonomy of five departments from the national government. These protest campaigns saw the activation or creation of groups of combative youth, notably the *Unión Juvenil Cruceñista* in Santa Cruz and *Juventud Kochala* in Cochabamba (Tórrez Rubín de Celis et al.). The latter groups engaged in a variety of forms of political violence and property destruction, including arson, collective beatings of individuals, attacks on

[12] I examined and argued against the regionalist interpretation (Eaton; Roca 67) in my analysis of the violence of the period (Bjork-James 2019).

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institutions and their buildings, street fights against other movements, and mass kidnapping. Lists and chronologies of such combative actions were compiled for Santa Cruz (Iskenderian Aguilera), for the Constituent Assembly in Sucre (Carrasco Alurralde and Albó), and during investigations into the 2007 Cochabamba and 2008 Sucre violence (Defensoría del Pueblo 2009; Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos de Cochabamba).

An August 10, 2008, recall referendum gave 67 percent support to Morales and removed right-wing Manfred Reyes Villa as prefect of Cochabamba. The Media Luna region went on strike ten days later, demanding funds from the government's tax on oil and gas production, and warned President Morales that he was unwelcome in their territories. Protesters took over or looted government buildings in four departmental capitals. Rural supporters of the Morales government marched on these capitals, leading to violent clashes, and suffering a massacre at El Porvenir (Defensor del Pueblo). In all, the crisis over eastern autonomy saw twenty-one deaths, five of them at the hands of state security forces (Bjork-James 2019). Ultimately, government supporters marched on and surrounded the National Congress, which authorized a referendum on the new constitution. Sixty-one percent of Bolivian voters approved.

IV. Demonstrative and Combative Elements of Bolivia's Repertoire of Contention

"When one social sector, with reason, with a justified reason . . . goes on strike, blockade, or march, what happens? Everyone supports it." So proclaimed Evo Morales to supporters in Cochabamba on October 24, 2019. This was the speech in which Morales unwittingly coined the name of the uprising that would overthrow him. "I could give them a workshop, a seminar on how to march, so they may learn," he boasted. By comparison, the urban civic movements he had seen before were just "two, three people stringing little ropes [across the street], setting out little tires. What kind of strike is that?" ("Evo Morales" 00:09:50–00:10:25). The anti-Evo movement already in full swing took Evo's condescension as its badge of honor; they became la *Revolución de las Pititas* [the Revolution of the Little Ropes].

Strikes, blockades, and marches make up the basic and most frequent elements of the Bolivian protest toolkit, its repertoire of contention. Each in its own way serves as a measure of the unity, number, and commitment of supporters of a given movement, demand, or political party, three of the four

qualities Charles Tilly argues social movements perform in their efforts to sway government. These protests measure Bolivian movements' *poder de convocatoria*, or power to convene, in a visible if not always decisive way. In Bolivia, these contests of convening power shape which policies are adopted or revoked, and whether presidents remain or resign (Bjork-James 2020, 213-215). By remaining mobilized, movements participate in an abstract test of wills with real political consequences.

Conversely, there is nothing abstract about burning someone's house down. The tactics considered in the rest of this article transform the nature of competition between movements by introducing elements of direct tactical clashes, threats to life and property, trauma, and loss. Arsons, face-to-face clashes and assaults between crowds, inter-protester gunfire, and orchestrated groups dedicated to these tactics are less frequently used parts of Bolivia's repertoire of contention. Several of these tactics were last commonplace during the 2006–2009 period of political polarization known as the catastrophic stalemate. Unlike strikes, blockades, marches, and *cabildos,* their impact does not scale with the number of participants, making them a poor measure of the relative strength and support of the movements using them. When used against persons, their homes, or even political headquarters, these tactics can communicate a total rejection of their target, often directly causing trauma or creating fear. Death is only the most obvious of their permanent consequences. In the next two sections, I consider partisan street clashes (including inter-protester gunfire) and arsons. For each tactic, I look at its broader use in Bolivian protest, its political meaning, and its specific presence during the 2006-2009 and 2019 events.

V. Partisan Street Battles

When two movements are vying to intervene in politics, both may turn to the streets to show their power: mobilization begets countermobilization. One approach to countermobilization is to simply mirror the tactics of rivals and (implicitly or explicitly) compare the scale of the actions. One side's rally prompts the other to stage a rally of its own. Significant counterprotests during the general strike waves of 1984 and 1985 preceded the resolution of the crisis through early elections in August, and ultimately the country's neoliberal turn (Conaghan and Malloy 124-126; Krain and Toral Alemañ 74–79). In June 2004, the *Comité Cívico Pro Santa Cruz* [Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee] convened a *cabildo* to propose a "June Agenda" of the East, in opposition to the

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"blockade," "centralism," and "violence" the committee attributed to the October 2003 protests (Assies 90). Sucre's 2007 *cabildo* demanding full capital status was followed by a *gran cabildo* in La Paz and El Alto, insisting "the seat [of government] shall not move" (Carrasco Alurralde and Albó). Movements will even blockade different stretches of the same road while making opposing demands.

In a smaller but still significant number of cases, Bolivian movements have physically confronted one another in open mass confrontations. These include conflicts over rural and urban land, over mining developments, among sectors of organized labor, and between political parties. From 1982 until 2006, there were no deadly partisan street clashes in Bolivia, but they emerged dramatically during the stalemate (Bjork-James 2022). The earliest clashes surrounded the pro-autonomy *cabildos* held in mid-December 2006. Pro-government movements held their own anti-autonomy *cabildo* in San Julián and blocked the passage of buses bound for the Santa Cruz *cabildo,* touching off a morning-long street battle, in which as many as sixty-eight people were reported wounded and two buses were set on fire ("La tensión en Bolivia").

As shown in Table 2, there was a long series of lethal incidents during the stalemate. In Cochabamba, the December 2006 pro-autonomy *cabildo* set off dueling downtown mobilizations, escalating to street battles on January 11 and 12, 2007. Though many of the pro-MAS protesters had sticks or slingshots, the civic movement was better equipped with weaponry, including firearms. Three deaths—two pro-MAS peasants and a teenage civic movement protester—and hundreds of injuries came in the melee that followed (Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos de Cochabamba). In December 2007, police battled anti-government protesters attempting to disrupt the Constituent Assembly in Sucre (often remembered as the clash in the La Calancha neighborhood). Pro-MAS protesters were only a minor presence in that confrontation (Defensoría del Pueblo 2009; "Noviembre negro"). In May 2008, civic movement protesters attacked a delegation of rural leaders in Sucre, taking dozens captive for hours and publicly humiliating them on the central square (Defensoría del Pueblo 2009; Brie 2008). In September 2008, rural movements led marches to departmental capitals challenging opposition calls for departmental autonomy. In Pando, protesters reinforced by departmental government employees tried to hold off these marchers in El Porvenir. After two civic movement protesters were shot dead during a morning clash, the civic movement attacked rural protesters, killing nine on September 11, 2008 (Brie 2014; Soruco Sologuren).

Finally, coca growers fatally wounded a civic movement protester on September 13 during clashes at a roadblock designed to stop their march to Santa Cruz.

Event	Date	Victim	Cause of death	Perpetrator Affiliation		Victim Affiliation	
Cochabamba Clashes	Jan. 11, 2007	Christian Urresti	Beating	Left Grassroots	Protesters	Civic Movement	Protester
		Juan Ticacolque Machaca	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Luciano Colque	Beating	Civic Movement	Protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
Constitution Protest Clashes, Sucre (Chuquisaca)	Nov. 24-25, 2007	Gonzalo Durán Carazani	Gunshot	National Gov't	Security Forces	Civic Movement	Protester
		José Luis Cardozo Lazcano	Gunshot	National Gov't	Security Forces	Civic Movement	Protester
		Juan Carlos Serrado Murillo	Tear gas canister	National Gov't	Security Forces	Civic Movement	Protester
Porvenir Massacre (Pando)	Sep. 11, 2008	Pedro Oshiro	Gunshot	Left Grassroots	Armed protesters	Civic Movement	Protester
		Alfredo Robles Céspedes	Gunshot	Left Grassroots	Armed protesters	Civic Movement	Protester
		Bernardino Racua	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Wilson Castillo Quispe	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Wilson Richard Mejía Miahata	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Arnaldo González Inuma	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Alfonzo Cruz Quispe	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Celedonio Bazoaldo García	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Felix Roca Torrez	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Ditter Tupa Matty	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Luis A. Rivero	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
		Jhonny Cari Sarzuri	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed protesters	Left Grassroots	Protester
Militarization of Cobija airport (Pando)	Sep. 12, 2008	Luis Antonio Rivero Siguekuni	Gunshot	National Gov't	Security Forces	Civic Movement	Protester
		Ramiro Tiñini Alvarado	Gunshot	Civic Movement	Armed Protesters	National Gov't	Security Forces
Pro-MAS march blockaded north of Santa Cruz de la Sierra	Sep. 13, 2008	Edson Abdad Ruiz Aguayo	Beating	Left Grassroots	Protesters	Civic Movement	Protester

Table 2: Deaths Related to Bolivia's Catastrophic Stalemate
Source: Ultimate Consequences Database

During the catastrophic stalemate, such clashes were a small fraction of the mass demonstrations. Competitive demonstrations of convening power,

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rather than physical efforts to disrupt one's opponents, were the main strategy. Ultimately, the MAS-IPSP prevailed when it directed its supporters away from likely confrontations in Santa Cruz and into a national march on the legislature to demand a referendum on the new constitution. In 2019, competing mobilizations challenging and defending the election results often collided, leading to escalating interpersonal violence, providing scenarios where one side deployed firearms, provoking several deaths, as shown in Table 4. Speaking at the Cochabamba *cabildo* on October 24, 2019, Evo Morales warned his supporters, "I want to ask you, brother leaders, delegates, do not enter into provocation. They are looking for a dead person to bring convulsion to the country, as they have in other countries. And here we are not going to offer them one" ("Evo Morales" 00:07:49–00:08:01). Yet the gradual spiral of escalation in metropolitan Cochabamba—ultimately a pivotal location in the crisis—began that very night when supporters and opponents of the president clashed near the coca growers' urban headquarters.

The second week of protests began with pro-government movements moving to break up opposition blockades in La Paz and Cochabamba. Pro-Morales miners removed several blockades in La Paz; heavy transport drivers and other government supporters fought with blockaders in Cochabamba; and pro- and anti-government residents fought across working-class neighborhoods of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, leaving scores injured ("Tres departamentos"). A lone gunman fired at least fifteen shots, wounding five in the eastern capital ("Santa Cruz vivió"). The next day, members of a pro-Morales crowd attacked and beat Julio Llanos, a former political prisoner participating in an unrelated vigil; he died from his injuries on November 28 ("Fallece el luchador").

In Montero (Santa Cruz department), conflict brewed after the largely pro-MAS neighborhood of Guadalupe Cofadena demanded the city pull out of the opposition blockades. Civic movement protesters responded with an overnight march threatening *collas* (highland Indigenous people) with death and attacks on six homes. Cofadena residents barricaded themselves in and kept round-the-clock vigils. On October 30, 2019, gunfire was exchanged in two incidents, wounding eleven people (including at least four MAS supporters) in the daytime and killing two Santa Cruz civic movement protesters after nightfall (GIEI-Bolivia 34-52, 387-389).

Back in metropolitan Cochabamba, confrontations raged on November 6. The right-wing *Resistencia Juvenil Cochala* (RJC) rode motorcycles into these clashes and fired homemade projectile weapons at their opponents. RJC

members took the MAS mayor of Vinto captive, abusing and forcibly marching her to the next town. RJC-affiliated student Limbert Guzmán was fatally wounded in Quillacollo. Immediately afterward, RJC members effected a brutal citizens' arrest upon four pro-government protesters, allegedly for beating Guzmán to death. An investigation conducted by the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes-Bolivia (GIEI) [Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts for Bolivia], created by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to carry out a parallel investigation of human rights violations during the 2019 crisis, found, however, that Guzmán was likely killed by a homemade explosive projectile launched by him or his comrades (GIEI-Bolivia 66-73).

Last, but not least, were the November 9-10, 2019, attacks on caravans of anti-Morales protesters en route to La Paz. One caravan was blockaded in Vila Vila, where locals alleged that caravan riders burned a house and barley crops. Assisted by surrounding residents, the pro-MAS locals attacked the caravan with teargas, dynamite, stones, and Molotov cocktails. Twenty-five passengers, mostly women, were physically and sexually assaulted, doused with fuel and threatened with burning, and forced to say that they were only protesting for money. Before dawn, pro-MAS gunmen in Challapata attacked the separate Miners' Caravan, which had some 2,500 participants. Five miners were wounded with gunfire. Government officials provided food, transportation, and anti-riot weapons and munition to the blockaders, and the GIEI concluded that they were aware of blockaders' violent intentions and carrying of firearms (GIEI-Bolivia 138-168).

VI. Arson

Arson, a well-established, if nearly universally criminalized means of protest throughout world history, has a variety of intents and effects (Archer; Wong 128). The social meaning of arson depends on the type of building targeted and the severity of the fire involved. The smallest acts of arson, such as the burning of presidential portraits at a government installation, are purely communicative acts. When its headquarters or archive is reduced to ashes, an advocacy organization or government department cannot do its work. Moreover, fires can be acts of direct threat; home fires, in particular, convey that their target is unwanted and will be at personal risk if they remain. (During the past four decades, there were only two deadly protest arsons in Bolivia: two Qaqachaka residents were killed when their home was burned in 1996,

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and a fire set by a protesting parents' group at the El Alto City Hall in 2016 caused the deaths of five municipal workers [Bjork-James 2022]).[13] Nonetheless, as Javier Auyero observed about an Argentine anti-corruption riot, every arson sends a political message: "public buildings and private houses [of political figures] are intensely meaningful places . . . . [They] acquire the status of focal points of protesters' action and anger" (131).

Arsons were deployed for all three of these purposes during the catastrophic stalemate. Leftist grassroots activists burned the wooden doors of Cochabamba prefecture in protest of Manfred Reyes Villa's alignment with the *media luna*. After the December 2006 blockade in San Julián, civic committees in northern Santa Cruz department conducted reprisal attacks. They burned a MAS party office in San Ramón, Indigenous community headquarters in Concepción and San Javier, and the homes and shops of several MAS supporters ("Arden oficinas indígenas"). These arsons paralleled other attacks on buildings in urban Santa Cruz, accomplished through looting, occupation, gunfire, and bombs (Iskenderian Aguilera).

After the first two deaths in their unsuccessful attempt to take over the Constituent Assembly, Sucre civic movement protesters turned their ire upon police stations and vehicles. A third protester was killed inside a police station. The local newspaper *Correo del Sur* remembered approvingly, "Chuquisacans reacted and exploded against police buildings. They burned everything" ("Noviembre negro" 9). Among the burned buildings was the home of MAS prefect David Sánchez Heredia, who then fled the country ("Suman las muertes"). The civic movement consecrated the three deaths in November 2007 as sacrifices for Chuquisaca, erecting a *mojón* (boundary marker) of autonomy in their honor in the central square. They also publicly proclaimed that national officials had no right to visit Sucre. Six weeks later, they displayed a burned-out car as a grim threat to Justice Minister Celima Torrico at the annual opening of the Supreme Court: "Celima, your car awaits" (Embassy La Paz).[14]

In the 2019 crisis, arsons came in three waves:

[13] A sixth worker was beaten to death. In addition, police fatally shot a protester during the attempted destruction of the Transit Police building in Sucre on November 25, 2007, and a policeman was fatally beaten as protesters took over and ultimately burned the Regional Police Command in El Alto on November 11, 2019.

[14] Unclassified cable titled "Evo avoids Sucre, Justice Minister unwelcome too" and leaked by WikiLeaks. The translation to English appears in the cable.

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Opposition attacks on electoral tribunals between October 21 and 23. The night after the election, the opposition targeted the Departmental Electoral Tribunals, where authorities were still counting the ballots. In Potosí, police accepted Civic Committee promises and relinquished control of the building,[15] and protesters set the building alight. Protest arsons also gutted the Electoral Tribunals in Sucre, Santa Cruz, and Trinidad, Beni. Whatever rage they had toward electoral authorities, protesters might have felt that ballots themselves contained either votes that weren't counted fairly or evidence of the fraud they suspected. Instead, they helped to burn ballots or whole electoral offices. It is testimony to the well-established role of property destruction in Bolivian protest that these events were primarily discussed as "popular fury" in the press ("Atacan sede de los cocaleros").

Opposition arsons between November 8 and 12. The November 8 police mutiny removed one major restraint on arson and property destruction. That night, Cochabamba protesters burned the Cochabamba headquarters of the *Seis Federaciones del Trópico de Cochabamba* [Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba], which includes MAS party offices and multiple state-aligned media outlets. On November 9, protesters outraged by the caravan attacks burned down the homes of the governor and the mayor of Oruro. On November 10, further arsons targeted members of the cabinet, senior legislators in the line of presidential succession, and other MAS officials. Along with acts of looting, kidnapping of politicians' relatives, and public repudiation of the attacks on the protest caravans, these acts motivated dozens of MAS officials to resign their offices. Finally, Indigenous *wiphalas* were burned outside the *Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional* (ALP) [Plurinational Legislative Assembly] and in Cochabamba's central square. These acts marked the overthrow of Morales as an act against Indigeneity itself, providing a lightning rod for mobilization that unified the city of El Alto behind protests in defense of the *wiphala* (Mamani Ramírez).

Pro-Morales arsons between November 10 and 19. In the Chapare, El Alto, parts of metropolitan Cochabamba, poorer neighborhoods of La Paz, and rural areas across much of the country, pro-MAS partisans organized resistance to a new government they saw as illegitimate. In Cochabamba and metropolitan La Paz/El Alto, protesters rapidly began destroying police stations and a range of

[15] *Comité Cívico Potosinista* (COMCIPO) [Potosinista Civic Committee) leader Marco Pumari detailed a verbal agreement for "la repliega de toda la policía y el control del Tribunal Electoral Departmental a partir de las organizaciones del Comité Cívico . . . a manos del Comcipo" (El Federal Noticias 1:45:19).

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other targets. By November 11, they had looted five police stations in El Alto, burning at least two; damaged fifteen police posts in La Paz; burned sixty-four Pumakatari public buses in two maintenance yards; and burned four police stations in metropolitan Cochabamba and one in Yapacaní (GIEI-Bolivia 78, 101-104, 121-122; Defensoría del Pueblo 2020, 56-60, 84). Arsons also targeted political opponents at their homes, including opposition leader Waldo Albarracín, El Alto Mayor Soledad Chapetón, and Nelson Condori, a rural leader who urged Morales to resign.

Most arsons on both sides occurred during the four days between the police mutiny on November 8, 2019, and the return of security force patrols on November 11. By targeting officials in their homes, anti-MAS home arsons reshaped the political landscape for what would become a year of interim government. Conversely, by disabling police capacity in regions of movement strength, protesters shifted the balance of forces for a period of ongoing mobilization, especially in the Chapare, which effectively became a self-policed zone for months.

VII. Mass Shootings of Demonstrators

In the week after Morales's ouster, pro-MAS protest gradually transformed into the more conventional form of leftist grassroots mobilization: coordinated road blockades and mass marches as part of a general strike. Two of these protests became the targets for the deadliest form of state violence: mass shooting of protesters by security forces.

In Sacaba, police blocked the passage of a Cochabamba-bound march by *cocaleros* on November 15, 2019. Following negotiations and a four-hour standoff, the police deployed teargas upon the marchers at 4 p.m., touching off a prolonged confrontation. Then soldiers with guns replaced police at the frontlines and started shooting. They pursued demonstrators as they fled, killing ten and wounding at least ninety-eight. Eight of those killed were struck at such a high velocity that the bullets passed through them. One survived nearly seven months with a bullet in his skull before succumbing to his injuries in June 2020 (GIEI-Bolivia 194-214; Melgarejo).

El Alto was the epicenter for a blockade campaign by neighborhood councils and the La Paz campesino federation. Protesters blockaded the road outside the Senkata YPFB gas installation beginning November 10 and began to seriously disrupt gas supplies in La Paz by November 14 (GIEI-Bolivia 228). On the morning of November 19, a convoy of gas tankers departed peacefully

under a military escort. Within the next hour, however, protesters re-established their blockade. Around noon, protesters toppled part of an exterior wall to the complex and military troops fired live ammunition as well as tear gas at the protesting crowd. The military's repression continued for over six hours and reached demonstrators four kilometers away. Eleven people were killed, thirty-one suffered bullet or projectile wounds, and at least seventy-eight were injured (GIEI -Bolivia 234).

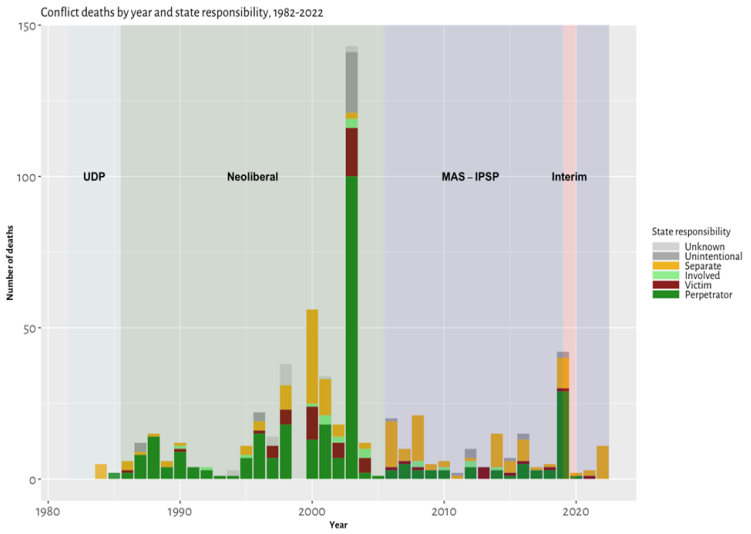

Figure 1: Deaths and State Responsibility from October 10, 1982, to August 2022 Background shading indicates political orientation of the government. The split background in 2019 and 2020 indicates that some deaths occurred under two different governments. However, all of the state perpetrator deaths in 2019 occurred during interim rule by the military or by Jeanine Áñez
Source: Ultimate Consequences Database

In light of the cases of lethal state violence in the Ultimate Consequences database, these mass shootings are distressingly familiar. There have been at least twenty-one events in which security forces shot three or more people during protests and twenty-eight to forty-three events in which security forces killed bystanders, often by firing indiscriminately beyond those protesting

(Bjork-James 2022). The Sacaba and Senkata massacres were the deadliest episodes of state violence since the 2003 Gas War, when security forces killed fifty-nine people over four weeks. Forty-eight of them died the weekend of October 11-13, 2003, when a militarized convoy ran another blockade at Senkata (Bjork-James 2022). Those mass killings sparked outrage against the national government, which ultimately sent President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada into exile one week later.

Mesa Gisbert publicly broke with Sánchez de Lozada's government on October 13, 2003, rather than share responsibility for the bloodshed (Mesa Gisbert 70-79). In January 2005, he signed Supreme Decree 27977, which sharply limited military repression. In quantitative terms, the limits Mesa Gisbert began were extremely successful and long-lived, as shown in Table 3. Under Mesa Gisbert, Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé, and Evo Morales, the security forces perpetrated fewer annual deaths than under any Bolivian president between 1985 and 2003 (see Figure 1 and Table 3). Overall conflict deaths declined sharply as well, though not quite to the levels that had reigned prior to 2000.

	Oct 1982 – Dec 1999 (17.24 years)	**Jan 2000 – Oct 19, 2003 (3.8 years)**	**Oct 19, 2003 – Nov 10, 2019 (16.1 years)**	**Nov 10, 2019 – Nov 8, 2020 (1 year)**
Deaths	155 (9.0/year)	245 (64.5/year)	154 (9.6/year)	34 (34/year)
State-perpetrator deaths	97 (5.6/year)	138 (36.3/year)	40 (2.5/year)	30 (30/year)
Share of deaths caused by security forces	63%	56%	26%	88%

Table 3: Deaths in four periods of the democratic era. Breaks mark the beginning of a major wave of protests (January 2000), the end of the Gas War and new limits on policing protest (October 2003), and the ouster of Evo Morales (November 10, 2019)
Source: Ultimate Consequences database

These restrictions were effectively overruled by the November 11 joint deployment order and by Áñez's Supreme Decree 4078, signed on November 14. Hard-line Interior Minister Arturo Murillo and Defense Minister

Luis Fernando López also set the tone. While written operational plans for deployment referred solely to nonlethal munitions, troops arrived fully armed. As departmental police commander Jaime Zurita warned the *campesino* leaders planning to march through Sacaba, declaring, "You have seen that there is a new commander, a new Army" (Defensoría del Pueblo 2020, 87), and "If you come into Cochabamba, I will hunt you [down]" (Atahuichi).[16]

VIII. A Quantitative Look at Lethal Political Violence

In this section, I present a quantitative analysis of deaths during the 2019 political crisis in Bolivia. Thirty-eight people were killed (or fatally wounded) in the thirty-one days from the October 20 election to the Senkata massacre on November 19, making this it the third-deadliest month in Bolivian political conflict since the October 1982 restoration of electoral democracy (Bjork-James 2022). As shown in Table 4, the perpetrators and scale of deadly violence shifted after Morales's resignation and Áñez's assumption of power (marked with horizontal black lines). During the three weeks of protests under Evo Morales, his supporters committed three of the five deadly acts. Neither the police nor military perpetrated deadly violence, nor apparently did they injure anyone with live gunfire.[17] During the two days of acephalous government, Morales's supporters were responsible for three deaths and security forces for six. Finally, under Jeanine Áñez, at least twenty-three and perhaps all twenty-four deaths were perpetrated by security forces.

Altogether, thirty deaths were perpetrated by security forces, six during the interim military government and twenty-four under Jeanine Áñez.[18] Thus, the 2019 crisis was deadlier and evolved much more swiftly than the 2006-2009 catastrophic stalemate. The thirty-eight deaths in 2019 spanned twenty-two days, versus twenty-one deaths sustained over 612 days between 2006 and 2009.

[16] Quoted and partially recorded by Defensor del Pueblo Nelson Cox.

[17] The military was not deployed against the anti-Morales movement, and senior officials announced orders to repress neither it nor the police munity (Corz). A review of the GIEI report finds no incidents involving security forces firing firearms or bullets under Morales.

[18] This includes the indirectly caused death of Silvio Condori. Responsibility for the shooting deaths of Beltrán Paulino Condori Arumi and Filemón Salinas Rivera is disputed, but police were actively firing at the time of their killings.

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Table 4: Deaths in Bolivia's 2019 Political Crisis

Event	When			Victim				How	Political Alignment		
	Y	M	D	First Name	Surnames	Age	Affiliation	Cause of Death	Perpetrator	Victim	
La Paz pro-Evo election march	2019	10	29*	Julio	Llanos Ramos	81	Urban Movement	Beating	Pro-MAS	Other protest	
Montero election clashes	2019	10	30	Marcelo	Terrazas Seleme	48	Urban Movement	Gunshot	Pro-MAS	Anti-MAS	
	2019	10	30	Mario	Salvatierra Herrera	55	Urban Movement	Gunshot	Pro-MAS	Anti-MAS	
Metro Cochabamba clashes	2019	11	6	Limbert	Guzmán Vasquez	20	Urban Movement	Explosion	Anti-MAS	Anti-MAS	
La Paz journalist beaten	2019	11	10*	Sebastián	Moro	40	Journalist	Beating	Anti-MAS ?	Pro-MAS	← Evo Morales resigns
La Paz post-resignation violence	2019	11	10*	Heyber Yamil	Antelo Alarcon		Security Force	Car crash	Pro-MAS	Security Forces	
	2019	11	11*	Juan José	Alcón Parra	43	Security Force	Beating	Pro-MAS	Security Forces	
	2019	11	11	Silverio	Condori	57	Urban Movement	Fall escaping repression	Security Forces	Pro-MAS	
	2019	11	11	Percy Romer	Conde Noguera	33	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander ?	
	2019	11	11	Beltrán Paulino	Condori Arumi	23	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander	
	2019	11	11	Juan Martín Felix	Pérez Taco	18	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander	
Metro Cochabamba post-resignation violence	2019	11	11	Miguel Angel	Ledezma Gonzales	24	Protester	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS	
	2019	11	11	Filemón	Soria Díaz	45	Civilian	Strangled	Pro-MAS	Bystander ?	
Betanzos post-resignation violence	2019	11	12	Marcelino	Jarata Estrada	53	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander	← Jeanine Áñez assumes presidency
Montero post-resignation clash	2019	11	13	Roberth Ariel	Calisaya Soto	20	Protester	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS	
Yapacaní post-resignation clash	2019	11	13	Filemón (Filimón)	Salinas Rivera	15	Protester	Gunshot	Security Forces ?	Pro-MAS	
Cochabamba mass arrest	2019	11	13	Juan José	Mamani Larico	35	Urban Movement	Beating / suffocation	Security Forces	Pro-MAS	

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Sacaba massacre	2019	11	15	Armando	Caraballo Escobar	25	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	15	Plácido	Rojas Delgadillo	18	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	15	Omar	Calle Siles	26	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	15	Lucas	Sánchez Valencia	43	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	15	Emilio	Colque Leon	21	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	15	Juan	López Apaza	34	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	15	César	Sipe Mérida	18	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	15	Marcos	Vargas Martínez	31	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	15	Roberto	Sejas Escobar	28	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	15	Julio	Pinto Mamani	51	Cocalero	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
Senkata massacre	2019	11	19	Clemente Eloy	Mamani Santander	23	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander?
	2019	11	19	Joel (José)	Colque Paty	22	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander?
	2019	11	19	Devi (Deyvid)	Posto Cusi	34	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander
	2019	11	19	Edwin	Jamachi Paniagua	38	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander?
	2019	11	19	Antonio Ronald	Quispe Ticona	23	Urban Movement	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander?
	2019	11	19	Pedro	Quisbert Mamani	37	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander
	2019	11	19	Rudy Cristian	Vásquez Condori	23	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander
	2019	11	19	Juan Jose	Tenorio Mamani	23	Urban Movement	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS
	2019	11	19*	Milton David	Zenteno Gironda	24	Urban Movement	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander?
	2019	11	19*	Calixto	Huanaco Aguilar	32	Civilian	Gunshot	Security Forces	Bystander?
	2019	11	19*	Emilio	Fernández		Campesino	Gunshot	Security Forces	Pro-MAS

* asterisk indicates died on later date

Source: Compiled by Carwil Bjork-James as part of Ultimate Consequences, a database of deaths in Bolivian political conflict from October 1982 to the present. For a description of the project, see: https://ultimateconsequences.github.io/

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The period of combative clashes, arsons, and blockades was only slightly longer, lasting thirty-four and 676 days, respectively.[19] However, if we extend the timeline to less-destructive tactics, we can recognize a longer impasse leading up to 2019. It may have begun as early as the 2012 resistance to Bolivia's first judicial elections or in the "no" campaign for the February 2016 referendum. Thought of this way, the impasse lasted for years, but until October 2019 did not have any of the three more damaging tactics examined in this article—tactics that remained part of the toolkit of protest, waiting for the moment when push came to shove.

Seen in light of the 2006-2009 stalemate, the tactics deployed in the 2019 crisis were not new, though they were deployed at a more rapid pace and in national waves of action rather than regional crises. In 2019, days such as October 30 in Montero and November 6 in Cochabamba seemed to cycle rapidly through all the most painful elements of the stalemate in a single day: brutal injuries, kidnappings, racialized humiliations, and death. By comparison with the previous decade, gunfire was more frequent, if less often deadly. It is little more than chance that shootings in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Montero, and Challapata did not claim more Bolivian lives. As it happened, sometimes unfairly, the Morales government appeared tightly linked to all three known deaths on the morning of November 10, and possibly complicit in the violence against the caravans. This explains why the COB issued a call for Morales to resign that day, speaking in much the same terms as the military high command three hours later.

IX. Parallels and Divergences

Why did the struggle between the MAS and the regional opposition drag on for so long during the catastrophic stalemate? And conversely, why was the pace of mobilization and of the deployment of political violence so much swifter in 2019 than it had been from 2006 to 2009? After all, many of the political actors were the same, at an institutional level (the MAS and the *Pacto de Unidad* [Unity Pact] of allied rural organizations, the *Comité Cívico Pro Santa Cruz* and other urban civic movement) and sometimes even an individual one. Here, I offer several possible explanations.

[19] The prior period began with the December 15, 2006, clashes in rural Santa Cruz and ended with the October 20, 2008, passage of referendum legislation. The 2019 period began with the electoral office arsons on October 21 and ended in the November 23 agreement for new elections.

First, during the 2006-2009 face-off, each side was building momentum behind its own institutional project. The MAS-led coalition was focused on writing and passing a new constitution, whereas civic movements rallied behind departmental autonomy to be achieved through referenda, and ultimately defiance of the national government's authority. Confrontations emerged in episodic contests with limited goals: proclaiming departmental autonomy, securing Sucre's capital status, repudiating the prefect, refusing the president entry into the city.

In 2019, however, the movement denouncing Evo Morales for electoral fraud and perpetual rule did not have a local goal to turn to. They weren't demanding their regions or cities be separate from the national government; rather, they desired new elections and the resignation of the current president. Their strategic situation was more like that of the protesters during the 2003 Gas War (and similar all-out confrontations in 1979, 1985, and 2005). The strategic rationale for those defending Morales before his resignation is a bit more complicated. In some regional settings, such as in Cofadena or Quillacollo, they were indeed on the defensive, with few options but to fight back. In others, such as the October 30 beating of Julio Llanos and the attacks on the mining caravan, their escalation had a high price in lost moral authority and political legitimacy.

Second, the etiquette of keeping mobilizations separate and comparing their mobilizing power through sheer numbers largely prevailed in the earlier standoff. Rather than confront each other physically, opposing protesters arranged separate rallies, competing *cabildos,* and parallel blockades. Such space-claiming forms of protest remained the modal form of participation in 2019, but both sides signaled in the first few days after the election their willingness to escalate tactically.

Finally, the Morales government made greater efforts to de-escalate tactically during the stalemate than in 2019. At significant moments, the MAS-IPSP coalition withdrew from confrontational spaces, as in the demobilization of leftist protesters after January 11, 2007, in Cochabamba; the relocation of the Constituent Assembly to Oruro (and corresponding withdrawal of police from Sucre) in November 2007; the standdown of security forces in Sucre on May 24, 2008; and the national government's gradual acceptance that the president and his security detail could not land in cities across the country. Even after the Porvenir massacre, the Morales government redirected grassroots energy from encirclement of eastern departmental capitals to a march on the National Congress. In 2019, the Morales government did keep its security

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forces out of the most violent and all deadly conflict, but it did not restrain or redirect its supporters from physical confrontations, arsons, or shootings against opponents.

Though street combat, fire, and security force shootings of demonstrators are dramatic and emotional tactics, they are not necessarily effective ones in the sense of leading the movement or faction that deploys them to victory. In 2009, García Linera argued that the combativeness of the opposition had been their undoing:

> The Civic Movement–Prefecture block begins their coup-seeking escalation: They take over institutions; we wait. They attack the police; we wait. They destroy and loot public institutions in the four departments; we wait . . . . They destroy pipelines; we wait . . . . To the degree that they burn and loot public institutions, they are delegitimized before their own social base as a handful of the violent. And then comes Pando: The prefect set off the Pando massacre . . . and this act made the tolerance of all of Bolivian society run out. (García Linera et al.)

As Gramsci might argue, switching to open confrontation reveals which party has the greater political strength, broader support, and more moral legitimacy. But this same standpoint can also help us understand the success of the anti-Morales coalition in seeking his ouster in 2019. Morales was weakened by his 2016 loss in a national referendum, just as he had been strengthened by a strong showing in 2008. The Morales government had disenchanted major parts of his grassroots coalition and lost the support of around a fifth of Bolivian voters who walked away from him between 2009 and 2019. The MAS-IPSP had imagined that the building of a hegemonic block was an irreversible process and failed to understand their own weakness before or after the 2019 election.

The Costs and the Aftermath

This paper has characterized the social meaning and political impact of three confrontational and destructive tactics in recent Bolivian history. No account of either crisis is complete without understanding these elements of the repertoire of contention. During the three weeks from the 2019 election to Morales's ouster, arson and partisan street confrontation played a defining role. Despite organizing scores of marches and rallies nationwide, neither side was willing to restrain itself. Opposition arsons at the beginning and end of this period openly targeted first, electoral authorities, and later, MAS politicians.

Yet on the eve of Morales's resignation, these were counterbalanced by three deaths on the anti-MAS side. Despite its lead in the popular vote, the MAS did not demonstrate a mandate from the streets in this pivotal period.

As we have seen, the proposition that Morales's resignation would "permit peace and stability to be maintained," as Armed Forces Commander Williams Kaliman suggested ("Las Fuerzas Armadas de Bolivia le pidieron la renuncia a Evo Morales"), could not have been more wrong. Where five civilians had been killed or fatally wounded in the three weeks before his resignation, thirty-one civilians and two members of the security forces would be killed in the succeeding nine days. State security forces were responsible for twenty-nine or thirty deaths in the aftermath of Evo Morales's ouster. In ten days, the police and military killed more protesters than they had in the previous ten years (twenty-two) or in any single year since 1982 except 2003 (Bjork-James 2022). Almost overnight, safeguards against military massacres that had stood for fifteen years were dismantled.

In the three years since this period, Bolivia's political polarization has continued, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and free and fair elections. Unable to leverage its control of the interim presidency into national electoral success, the right-wing opposition is once again engaged in occasional "national" strikes that largely consist of massive *cabildos* and blockades in urban areas. Street violence between opposed crowds resurfaced in November 2021. Arsons and lootings reemerged during the November 2022 census crisis and the response to the December 2022 arrest of Luis Fernando Camacho. As of January 2023, five people have died in partisan conflict under President Arce. There is a new stalemate, but it remains to be seen just how catastrophic it will be.

Accountability for the human rights abuses of 2021 remains a core issue for the country. The GIEI conducted an investigation from November 2020 to August 2021 and presented a 479-page report covering acts by all sides (GIEI-Bolivia). Prosecution, however, remains in the hands of the Arce government and must be carried out through Bolivia's overburdened criminal justice system. Both the opposition and some Western human rights groups have raised concerns about the perceived partiality of this process, but none have proposed an alternate venue for these trials. The Arce government thus has the critical challenge of holding perpetrators of massacres accountable in a way that makes these acts politically unthinkable once more.

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