**Forum:** General Assembly 4

**Issue:** Political Instability in Bolivia

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**Introduction**

Bolivia’s political unrest for decades has resulted in harsh consequences that are resulting in an economic downfall of the country. According to UNICEF, Bolivia remains to be one of the poorest countries in South America. Bolivia is currently combating issues such as on-going protests, corruption, violation of human rights and poverty. The instability of the government is also an ongoing crisis as the former president, Evo Morales resigned from his presidency after the disputed elections in November 2019. Rural areas such as Uyuni and Rurrenabaque, as well as cities including La Paz and Santa Cruz de la Sierra take the weight of these issues.

Bolivia has been experiencing political instability ever since the country suffered a deep economic recession in the 1980s. This had an impact on employment, inflation and development of the country. More than half of the country was left unemployed which resulted in severe poverty and hindrance in development of the country and the lifestyles of the people. This was a major decline in labor wages, money distribution and affordability of goods. By 2001, former president Hugo Banzer resigned from his position and this time onwards the next few presidents of Bolivia, including Jorge Quiroga (term: 2001-2002), Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (term: 2002-2003) and Eduardo Rodriguez (term: 2005-2006), continuously changed. This frequent change of government resulted in constant economic instability which was a setback for increase in steady growth (economic and infrastructure) and condition of the people. Bolivia’s situation had scope for improvement and this could be possible as in 2006, the former president, Evo Morales came to power. Morales worked on stabilizing the economy in his 13-year term which enabled momentum in growth for the country and improved the lives of the citizens.

Even today, according to the United Nations Development Report, the human development index is 0.693 which indicates medium human development. World Bank has also declared Bolivia to classify as a lower middle-income country due to the moderate economic growth and its social and humanitarian effects as well.

Although the situation due to political instability has had and continues to have a heavy impact on the citizens, progress has been made towards improving the economy and reducing poverty. According to the borgen project, the poverty rate in Bolivia has reduced from 63.3% in 2002 to 39% in 2018 due to efforts made by former president, Morales. He strengthened international relations with the United States, Brazil and Japan by exporting tin, crude petroleum and zinc ore. The incoming of money encouraged increase in labor wages and distribution of money amongst the poor.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Corruption**

Dishonest or criminal activity executed by a person or organization who/which has misused their power.

**Democracy**

A government system where the people of a country can vote and elect the president.

**Disputed election**

A disputed election is an election that is won unfairly. Examples are rigged votes (people that have voted multiple times or when voting booths for certain parties are closed, thus not allowing populations to vote for them).

**Human Development Index (HDI)**

HDI measures 3 basic aspects of human development, health, education and income and averages the numbers. The HDI of a country can indicate the country’s economic welfare. It ranges from 0 to 1, the closer the index is to 1, the better the human development index.

**Military junta**

A military dictatorship where the military has substantial or complete political authority.

**Right-wing politics**

A system where the people involved have conservative ideology pertaining to religion, nationalism and hierarchism.

**Socialist presidency**

A president thatbelieves in socialism. Socialism is a political and economic system where all members of society are treated equally and have access to basic needs shelter, education and healthcare.

**Recession**

A period of economic decline that lasts for at least 6 months, where an economy doesn’t grow due to a decrease in GDP.

**Background Information**

Political instability in Bolivia has been a complex matter that the country has been battling for a century with staggering progress. It is a consequence of wars that have weakened the economy and given rise to corruption amongst the citizens, including the administration. The political instability also engenders humanitarian and social impacts.

**The beginning of Bolivia’s decline**

Over time Bolivia has proved to show a decline in political instability as the country was involved in political conflicts with South American countries including Chile, Peru and Paraguay. On April 5, 1879, the War of Pacific took place between Chile, Peru and Bolivia. Chile annexed all of Bolivia’s coastal region, declaring it landlocked. This took place as worthy resources such as nitrate and guano deposits were in the Atacama desert, of which Peru and Bolivia owned parts of. Though the mines were operated and owned by Chile, there were disputes over taxes which caused Chile to exercise power over Peru and Bolvia’s land. The war continued until October 29, 1883, leaving Bolivia with constant losses in the economy and on-going struggle to protect the land. This caused a major economic downfall for Bolivia as their economy relied heavily on the coastal line for trade and according to BBC, their trade decreased by a third due to lack of access. This immediately took a toll on salaries and the country's development as the loss of the territory could not be afforded.

In 1928 on September 9, the Chaco war became a conflict between Paraguay and Bolivia. The war was caused by a border dispute over Chaco Boreal, a dry and sparsely populated region owned by Bolivia. Though the land was underdeveloped, it had a few oil discoveries. These were crucial to the country after losing access to the sea after the War of Pacifc, as the Atlantic ocean could be accessed through oil pipelines and Paraguay River. Border incidents drove the militaries of both countries to be at war. Simultaneously, Bolivia was going through a political shift where the Republican party split into smaller fractions. A military junta ruled until Daniel Salamanca Urey was elected as a coalition candidate. As he came into power he failed to suppress the social unrest as well as managing the economy during the Great Depression. Salamanca got overthrown on November 27, 1934 as he wanted to continue the war by increasing the military budget regardless of the suffering economy, rather than reaching an agreement and ease the political heat. In 1938 a definite settlement was reached between Bolivia and Paraguay with the intervention of countries that remained neutral, the United States, Peru, Chile, Colombia, Brazil and Argentina. In this consensus Bolivia was able to retain petroleum fields but lost Chaco. Bolivia was heavily impacted as a third of its population had died or was captured.

Although these political conflicts occurred over centuries, they have had an everlasting effect on Bolivia’s economic and political instability as the country’s political situations worsened during the wars which resulted in inabilities to salvage the economy. In addition to this the focus of political leaders such as Salamanca was diverted towards winning the war at further cost of the country’s financial state which led to further drops in economy.

**Corruption**

Bolivia’s corruption rate amongst other countries ranks 118 out of 183 countries assessed by the Corruption Perception Index. There is political corruption mainly due to the fact that there is not any control or safeguarding system to ensure the integrity of political parties and their candidates. This also means that the financing of political parties and the finances of their candidates are not monitored which allows any party with corrupt candidates to run in the elections, as well as parties that are financed through unethical means such as laundered money. Citizens including government officials, are driven by extreme poverty and lack of money and therefore indulge in illegal activities including bribery and organized crime that earn them easy money. Corruption also resides in the national police as they have been involved in organized crime. An example of this is when people from the police force cultivated extra coca leaves (above the legal limit of 50g) and produced drugs such as cocaine. They then trafficked the cocaine to neighboring countries, Chile, Peru and Argentina and even exported the cocained to the United States. Moreover the police officers were supported by former president Morales. Morales justified the mass cultivation of coca leaves by promoting their health benefits.

**Humanitarian**

 ***Violation of Human Rights***

Morales was pushed to resign from his socialist presidency due to rigging of votes in the 2019 Election and holding onto power beyond the term limit, ignoring the constitution. After he stepped down, the vice president Jeanine Anez, was chosen to serve as the interim president. In her initial days as president, she tore down the Whiphala flag that signifies multiculturalism off the presidential palace. As a result, the people took to conveying their dissatisfaction by protesting outside government offices. In return, she instructed the police to open fires on the protestors, threaten them. The aggressive response by the police has left 33 people dead, 804 people injured and 1,511 people arrested, according to the New York Times. This is a clear violation of human rights against the people of Bolivia that has been initiated by the government as the citizens have a fundamental right to express their opinions.

**Social**

 ***Poverty***

The political instability in Bolivia due to constant change in adminitaistation and lack of effective control of the country has resulted in major poverty across the country as well as extreme economic decline. Approximately 39% of Bolivia’s population lives in poverty. The poverty rates are highest in rural areas such as Uyuni and Rurrenabaque. According to Habitat for Humanity, 58% of the poor population living in mud huts due to unemployment and lack of income. These mud huts lack sanitation due to the dirty mud as well as the uneven roads near the huts. This results in people contracting diseases such as respiratory and stomach infections. The extremity of poverty reaches a point where poor people choose to drink tap water as opposed to purchasing bottled water even though it is sold at a reasonable price, which also makes them fall prey to stomach infections. The economic decline is an obstacle that is preventing the advancement of the country. For example, there is a severe absence in the presence of healthcare facilitation centers in Bolivia, specifically rural areas. While the issue of affordability has been tackled as it has been made free of cost for the poor, there is still a limited number of medical centers across cities and rural areas. Lacks of funds continue to stagnate the construction of medical centers. While this is an issue in itself the poverty amongst the people stops them from getting a high-quality education leaving them incapable of being employed. The economic decline has led to people receiving inadequate salaries as companies do not have the means to support workers.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**Venezuela**

In the November of 2019, after the riots broke out post-Morales’ resignation, the temporary president of Bolivia Jeanine Anez broke diplomatic ties with Venezuela. This was mainly aimed at the government of Nicolas Maduro. Anez believed that the Venezuelan diplomats in the Bolivian embassy were compromising Bolivia’s internal security. This happened after nine Venezuelan citizens in Bolivia were found with weapons and were suspected to have initiated the riots that took place. After this incident, Anez made the decision to break ties with Venezuela particularly while Maduro’s government would be in power, and Venezuelan staff from the embassy were also sent back to Venezuela for the safety of the Bolivian people.

**United States**

The United States has had an alliance with Bolivia since 1837. The United States made efforts in eradicating organized crime even though former president, Morales resisted their actions. In 2017, there was an ongoing case regarding the production of cocaine within Bolivia and exportation to neighboring countries as well as the United States. The United States sent anti-drug agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration to Bolivia to advocate against the usage and distribution of drugs. Morales immediately expelled the agents and instead supported the mass production of coca leaves that are used to produce cocaine. He overlooked the issue by stating that coca leaves are beneficial to maintaining good health and that there will be no prohibition against the excess production of coca leaves. In response to Morales’ reaction, the United States made efforts to discuss the intensity of the issue with Morales but Morales did not let them interfere.

**World Bank**

World Bank otherwise known as the International Bank for reconstruction, has worked towards improving access to healthcare in Bolivia. In 2018, the World Bank approved a loan of $300 000 to improve access and quality of healthcare services in Bolivia. This money will be used to implement healthcare systems across cities and rural areas of Bolivia. The project also includes training physicians and nurses that are fully qualified and employing them in the various healthcare systems being built. This initiative has been taken up by them as they work towards assisting the poor with a vision to eradicate poverty in the future.

**Chile**

Ever since the War of Pacific in 1879, Bolivia and Chile have been at loggerheads. Though Chilean president, Sebastian Pinera approached Evo Morales to discuss the border dispute, his attempt remained unsuccessful as both presidents were rigid in the mindset as well as strictly adhered to the border agreement. Pinera refused to comply with Bolivia’s demand to use the Chilean port as well as access to Chilean territory.

**Timeline of Events**

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| --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Description of Event** |
| April 5, 1879 - October 26, 1883 | The War of the Pacific was fought between Chile, Peru and Bolivia where Chile seized Bolivia’s coastal region, making it landlocked.  |
| September 9, 1932 - June 14, 1935 | The Chaco war was fought between Paraguay and Bolivia over the Chaco region where Chaco became a part of Paraguay.  |
| 1980 | Bolivia experienced a recession and great depression resulting in a major decline in the economy, including loss of jobs, as well as a decline in the GDP per capita.  |
| 2002 | Mayor of La Paz (a city in Bolivia), Juan del Granado declares a ‘Zero Tolerance Policy’ against corruption in La Paz.  |
| January 22, 2006 | Rise of former president Evo Morales.  |
| November 10, 2019 | Morales’ government gets overthrown with senator Jeanine Anez stepping into the position of president temporarily. Anez takes the indigenous flags away from the country and protests begin.This is followed by the visit of French Diplomat, Jean Arnault who attempted to peacefully resolve the political crisis.  |

**Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

Amidst the departure of the former president, Evo Morales, severe resistance against the new government has taken place in the forms of protests and marches. There was severe violence between the police that was supporting the government and this resulted in casualties and destruction. This was a serious matter of concern for the UN secretary-general, Antonio Guterres. Guterres was represented by Jean Arnault when (French diplomat) to meet the Bolivian parties and sort the crisis out peacefully. His visit was a success as the agreement made was to hold fresh and credible elections so as to follow through with the rights and well being of the people and Bolivia as a democracy.

 In February 2019, the United Nations made efforts to diminish political instability in Haiti where there were violent protests calling for the president, Jovenel Moise to step down due to allegations of the government being corrupt. The protests were led by Opposition groups. The protests that primarily took place in Haiti started influencing other cities to protest. As the protests started taking place through various cities such as Cap- Haitien and Jacmel, the issue got aggravated and resulted in over 200 casualties. The people also protested because of a drop in the standard of living in addition to inflation at 15%. The core group of a UN mission MINUJUSTH (The United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti) worked towards peacekeeping and justice support in Haiti, including the head of the mission, Helen Meagher as well as the UN ambassadors of Brazil, Frace, Canada Spain, Germany, the European Union, the United States and the Special Representative of the Organization of American States. They understood the demands of the protestors and called upon social and political leaders to engage in inclusive dialogue in order to generate sustainable and effective solutions towards solving the political and economic instability in Haiti. They recommended that the government improve management of state resources which would encourage economic growth. They urged for peaceful actions to be taken and a budget to law to be implemented in the year of 2019.

**Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue**

In 2002, the former mayor and political lawyer of La Paz, Juan del Granado introduced a ‘Zero Tolerance Policy’ to fight against and ban corruption in La Paz in his first two years as mayor. He made it clear that corruption of any kind including theft, murder, fraud and any action that opposes/ challenges the constitution would have consequences through lawful procedures. In his term, he prosecuted and imprisoned the city’s former mayors, Gaby Candia, Lupe Andrade and German Monroy Chazaretta for impunity. This threatened criminals and significantly reduced crime rates in La Paz. In addition to this, he supported and protected journalists and social groups that had exposed corrupt politicians and were being threatened. He also attempted to recover any money that was lost illegally and tried to foster the economy and city’s policies. To improve and encourage infrastructural development, Granado contracted credible external funders and aid agencies that would support his initiatives. Grenado’s implementation of the ‘Zero Tolerance Policy,’ earned the citizens’ trust and respect for his governance as they saw positive changes and potential in the city’s administration and policy. The vigour with which the policy was executed instilled belief towards the law itself and that it had to be strictly followed.

**Possible Solutions**

Tackling corruption effectively mainly involves taking measures of prevention. When the government is ethical and strict it will have a direct impact on the citizens of Bolivia as well as the policies that will be introduced. There need to be ways to prevent politicians and the government from committing frauds and feeling liberty to participate in bribery, rigging votes and organized crime. This can be through the implementation of thorough background checking of politicians. When the government is law-abiding, the government can take proper control and informed political decisions. Having an uncorrupt government will ensure ethical activities and will influence citizens positively. In addition to this, there needs to be consequences that apply to the citizens in cases of going against the law in any form, across Bolivia. This is crucial as this will be a threat to people who would consider being involved in corrupt activities as well as increase conscience about the power that the law has, making it unbendable.

In addition to stabilizing administration, considering the current governmental crisis that Bolivia is undergoing, it is advisable to hold presidential elections as this could potentially eliminate corrupt governments and abide by the fact that Bolivia is a democracy and that Bolivian citizens have a right to vote for their president rather than having a self-declared government. This also gives the county opportunities to rise given their unstable economic situation with an incorrupt government, and gain respect in the people’s eyes.

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**Appendix or Appendices**

1. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2015/wp15265.pdf> (Explaining Inequality and Poverty Reduction in Bolivia)

This is a report on the progress that Bolivia has made in reducing poverty and introducing equality from 2000-2015. The report depicts the differences through the 15 year period and provides a comparison as well as detailed reasoning and analysis of the development over time.

II. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/chaco-war.htm> (Chaco War)

This article provides an insight about the Chaco War. It discusses political and economic decline in Bolivia during the war. The article discusses how political decisions made by the Bolivian administration lead to a greater breakdown in the economy and its relation to political instability and how the economic decline links to political instability.