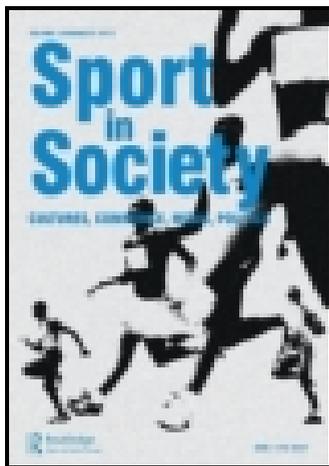


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Sport as a tool for deflecting political problems: Bolivia's President Morales' successful campaign against FIFA's ban on high-altitude football

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Sport as a tool for deflecting political problems: Bolivia's President Morales' successful campaign against FIFA's ban on high-altitude football

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In 2007, FIFA banned international matches in high altitudes for concerns about the players' health. Bolivia's President Evo Morales, representing a country affected by this ruling, initiated a successful campaign against the ban that was lifted after only one year. The article argues that one of the main aims of Morales' campaign was to deflect internal and external political problems. His socialist government was under high pressure in domestic politics by conservative autonomist movements, and in foreign relations, tensions with neighbouring countries such as Brazil resulted from his government's decision to nationalize foreign companies and cooperate with Venezuela. Apart from the political motives for his campaign, the article shows how Morales mobilized the Bolivian population and allied with other countries to fight FIFA's decision.

In May 2007, *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) made a controversial decision: the governing body of world football announced a ban on international matches being played in venues higher than 2500 m (*Economist* 2007b). FIFA's President Sepp Blatter referred to a recommendation of the organization's medical committee and justified the decision with the argument that playing in high altitudes 'is not healthy or fair' (*BBC* 2007), arguing that there would be an unfair home advantage for highland teams and the players' health would be harmed.

One of the countries most affected by this ruling was Bolivia.¹ The matches of the country's national team as well as matches in national and continental competitions of the Bolivian clubs Club Bolivar, The Strongest and La Paz FC were played in La Paz in the *Estadio Hernando Siles* at an altitude of 3577 m (*Historiadel futbolboliviano*). La Paz is the second largest city in Bolivia (after Santa Cruz). It is not the official capital of Bolivia (the constitutional capital is Sucre), but the seat of the government and all main institutions of the country are located there.

On the day after FIFA announced its decision, Bolivian President Evo Morales called for a cabinet meeting and started a campaign against the ban. He mobilized the domestic population and different stakeholders from the Bolivian society against the ban and started to form alliances with other countries and actors from abroad against FIFA. According to Morales, FIFA's decision is 'not only a ruling against Bolivia, but against the universality of sport' (Hughes 2007). Morales called the ban 'football apartheid' (Carroll 2008). 'FIFA and South American officials cannot make the historic mistake of discriminating against people who are born, live and practice sport at altitude. They cannot punish those of us who live near the mountains', said Morales (*FourFourTwo* 2007).

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A year later, the Morales campaign achieved success: in May 2008, the world football body lifted the ban.

This article analyses the political processes that occurred between the ban on high-altitude football matches in May 2007 and the lifting of the ban in May 2008.

Playing football in high altitudes has been controversial since 1916, when the South American Football Association (CONMEBOL) was founded and matches between Bolivia and other countries started to take place in La Paz. Since 1960, clubs from all over South America had to play in La Paz and other high-altitude cities in South America when the prestigious *Copa Libertadores* – a competition for clubs from South America that can be compared to the European Champions League – was initiated. There have always been critical discussions on playing in high altitudes, but it was not until 2007 that a ban on international matches above 2500 m was introduced by FIFA.

The main research questions of this article are the following: why was the campaign against the ban finally successful, resulting in a lift of the ban only 13 months after its promulgation? Why did the Bolivian President Morales put so much emphasis on the anti-ban campaign? Domestic discussions as well as external political processes are investigated.

The role of sports in politics

The Bolivian President Morales is known for his passion for football. Whenever possible, he plays pick-up games with his staff. When he is travelling throughout the country, matches are organized for him. Every Bolivian regularly sees in the media the President playing his favourite sport. This is not unique to Morales; many politicians all over the world like to practice sport in public. In the USA, ‘running for election’ also means to present the public daily pictures of a candidate who is jogging or practicing another sport. President Obama, for example, is well known for his passion for basketball. Russian President Vladimir Putin, for instance, regularly delivers the media pictures of him doing different sports such as judo and hockey. Why do leading politicians like doing sports in public? According to Behringer, politicians want to show that they are fit, not only physically but also for the challenges that await them; it is also a way to show that they are not an isolated elite but close to the people (2012).

This article is an example for the failure of ‘the conventional liberal mantra that sports and politics should not mix’ (Gilchrist and Holden 2013, 1). Houlihan differentiates between ‘politics and sport’ and ‘politics in sport’ (2008). Politics in sport analyses the role of sports’ governing bodies such as FIFA which resolve issues that arise within sports itself, whereas politics and sport are investments, regulations and interventions in the sport sector by governments. This research is an example how politics in sport (in this case FIFA’s prohibition of international football matches in high altitudes) and politics and sport (lobbying by the Bolivian government to revise a decision that was made by a sport’s governing body) can be interconnected and mix with each other.

Sport is a popular tool for politicians because little else attracts the masses as much as sporting events. Two indicators of the popularity of sports are the number of people that practice sports as well as the attendance at professional sports leagues matches, which far outnumbers attendance at other important societal institutions such as churches and theatres. Therefore, the sport sector is a perfect platform for transmitting messages to the public, for example against racism or for a healthy lifestyle.

Sport is also an ‘opiate of the masses’, suitable to deflect the public attention away from other issues, particularly if unpopular decisions are made. As an expert interviewed

for this research said, 'Football is a main pillar of Evo's rule. While his vice president is announcing important decisions, Evo publicly plays a football match somewhere in the country' (Käss 2012).

Morales has been Bolivia's President since 2006. His election is part of Latin America's shift to the left that started with the election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998.

After three decades of dictatorship and neoliberal restructuring, . . . leaders such as Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva have made bold claims about their determination to advance new, more egalitarian social programs and, more comprehensively, to change the way in which power is exercised in Latin America. (Beasley-Murray, Cameron, and Hershberg 2009, 319)

Morales is among the South American politicians considered to be the hard-core leftist leaders in the region, presenting more radical anti-neoliberal models of governance than the other left-leaning governments in the region.

While Brazil, Chile and Peru are led by administrations that are leftist to the extent that they support greater welfare and wealth redistribution than does the discarded neoliberal model, they are clearly committed to mainstream global capitalism. This stands in contrast to the more hardcore left in South America that aims to defy transnational capital in some important respects, and which also endeavours to empower the state as a major agent of economic affairs in a manner that reflects the interests of the disenfranchised. This group includes Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador. (Rochlin 2007, 1331)

This article will show that at the time of the FIFA decision to ban international matches from being played in high-altitude locations, Morales faced high pressure in domestic politics from conservative movements seeking autonomy for the lowland provinces and was at the same time considered to be 'hardcore left' abroad by those countries whose businesses were nationalized by Bolivia's new President (Rochlin 2007, 1331). Therefore, the *Economist* commented on FIFA's ban on high-altitude football matches and the Bolivian President's campaign against the decision, that

Evo Morales must have been delighted . . . Many of Mr. Morales' gestures in the 17 months since he took office as Bolivia's first-ever elected President of Andean Indian descent have been more divisive. His most popular policy, the nationalization of oil and gas, has irritated foreign governments and investors. The 'democratic revolution' he promises – a transfer of wealth and power from Bolivia's white and mestizo (mixed race) elite to the mainly Andean Indian poor – alarms the prosperous eastern provinces. (*Economist* 2007a)

The academic literature, selected magazines and newspapers on Bolivian politics in general and on the discussion around the FIFA ban in particular were reviewed for this work. In addition, this research is based on semi-structured interviews the author conducted in summer 2012 while serving as visiting scholar at the Technical University of Oruro in Bolivia. I talked to eight different people: to the political science professor Dr urlid=Leon Bieber in Santa Cruz; to Dr Fidel Terrazas Camacho from the Postgraduate Office of the Technical University of Oruro, who is also a former Dean and President of that University. In La Paz, I talked to Dr Hugo Celso Felipe Mansilla Ferret, correspondent of the Real Academia Española; to Susanne Käss from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Anja Dargatz from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation; Luis Zavala from a Bolivian anti-corruption NGO; Guido Loayza Mariaca, the president of the Bolivian football club Bolivar; and Eduardo Villegas, coach of the club The Strongest and former player and coach of the Bolivian national team. I had the opportunity to meet with Dr Terrazas Camacho and Zavala several times.

The article begins by reviewing the academic debate on the ban of high-altitude football. Three studies were published after FIFA decided to ban matches at high-altitudes:

one of them was from the field of economics and another from engineering science. The main content of these articles was comprised of different calculations determining whether the Bolivian national football team had in the past an advantage or not from playing in high altitudes. The two studies revealed divergent results. Another contribution came from the sports philosophy literature and represented more a normative discussion of the issue. The main results of the three papers are summarized here.

This article does not aim to make another contribution on the question of whether high-altitude football should be allowed or not. The new dimension offered by this work is to analyse how the ban became a highly politicized issue. Therefore, this article investigates the domestic political processes influencing reactions to the ban and then analyses the external political processes around the ban. The main results of this work are summarized and a brief outlook on the future discussion on banning high-altitude football is given.

The academic debate on the ban of high-altitude football

The first broad public debate about sport in high altitudes took place around the 1968 Olympics, which were held in Mexico City at a height of about 2300 m (two years later, the FIFA World Cup also took place in Mexico, Mexico City being one of the five host cities). Before the Games, some called the Mexico Games ‘the death Olympics’ due to the altitude of the host city (Kasperowski 2009, 1264). Nobody died, but in the first distance race of the Games – over 10,000 m – the Australian Ron Clarke collapsed and was unconscious for 10 minutes (Wrynn 2006, 1165). However, the altitude issue did not lead to demands to boycott or, after the case of Clarke, to end the Games. There were threats to boycott the Games, but for other reasons:

The civil rights movement in the US, the global protests against the war in Vietnam, opposition to apartheid in South Africa and the emancipation of former colonies created threats to boycott the Mexico City Olympic Games The threat of boycott against South Africa almost put an end to the Olympic Games in Mexico City. The problem of altitude might not have had that potential, but it was a disturbing one as it was of direct concern to the athletes and raised questions of fairness and amateurism that were dependent on the larger issues of equality and social change at that time. (Kasperowski 2009, 1279)

After FIFA issued its ban on matches at high altitudes, three academic articles discussing the issue were published, which will be reviewed in this section. In the first article reviewed, McSharry tested how much altitude affects international football performance by using a database covering a century of matches. He analysed the scores of international football games played in South America between 1900 and 2004. This data set contained football scores for 10 national teams with a total of 1460 games. The conclusion of the study was that

the altitude difference between home and away teams in international football games in South America significantly affected the outcome of games. High altitude home teams scored more and conceded fewer goals when playing low altitude teams, and for each additional 1000 m of altitude difference the home team’s score increased by about half a goal. In the case of Bolivia playing against a sea level opponent such as Brazil, the probability of a home win was effectively increased from 0.537 to 0.825 because of altitude. (McSharry 2007, 1280)

According to McSharry, a weakness of his study was the difficulty in accounting for other factors that influence football outcomes. Therefore, Chumacero developed a different approach based on economics in order to evaluate the determinants of the outcomes of the World Cup qualifying matches played in South America and to answer the question of how important it is for matches in Bolivia to be played in La Paz. In his econometric models, he considered four types of factors: the quality of the teams (using indicators such as FIFA

team rankings), socio-economic characteristics (such as per capita GDP of countries), crowd effects (for instance number of spectators attending the match) and other factors (such as humidity, temperature and altitude of the city). Chumacero concludes that 'Bolivia wins fewer and loses more matches than expected' (2009, 631). The author also refers to the fact that Bolivia only qualified in 1994 for the World Cup and that in the *Copa Libertadores*

despite having several teams that play in La Paz, Oruro, and Potosi (which are cities with altitudes of even more than 3600 m above sea level) only one of them has been able to pass the first round qualifying matches (Bolivar) It is difficult to consider that altitude is an overwhelmingly important factor in determining the outcomes of matches. Home-field advantage and the relative quality of the teams involved appear to be more important. (Chumacero 2009, 632–633)

Torres has written a more normative paper, arguing that 'FIFA violates its own principle of universality via the ban' (2009, 15). One of his main arguments is that in the qualifying rounds of the World Cup and the *Copa Libertadores* teams play each other twice.

This kind of football organization minimizes the impact of high altitude or any other single factor the advantages and disadvantages related to playing home and away are, in principle, evened out. For instance, in South America whatever advantage is gained in high altitude might be compensated for by the disadvantage of playing in other challenging external conditions, such as tropical weather, which some scientists believe causes more troublesome adaptations than does high altitude. (Torres 2009, 8)

Torres concludes that 'the long history of South American football confirms that superior teams consistently advance to the finals of the Men's World Cup, and finish first in both regional national team and international club competitions' (2009, 12).

The purpose of summarizing the academic debate was to illustrate the uncertainty even on scientific level of how altitude affects football performances. The academic uncertainty might be an explanation why the Bolivian government was able to initiate a more normative discourse, as discussed in the next section on the domestic political process.

The domestic political processes

At the time of the FIFA decision, Morales faced high pressure in domestic politics by conservative movements seeking autonomy for the lowland provinces in the east of Bolivia. Scheduled by former President Carlos Mesa, a nationwide referendum on autonomy took place in July 2006. A majority of Bolivians (56%) rejected regional autonomy, but 71.13% of the voters in Bolivia's most vibrant economic region, Santa Cruz, voted in favour. Also the other lowland departments Beni (73.83%), Tarija (60.8%) and Pando (57.69%) voted overwhelmingly for autonomy (Rochlin 2007, 1334).

In May 2008, the Department of Santa Cruz held another regional referendum on autonomy (not authorized by the state and deemed 'unconstitutional' by Morales). The result was that 86% of voters in Santa Cruz supported autonomy (Eaton 2011, 296). Apart from the referendums, there was a series of strikes and rallies in Santa Cruz that constituted the largest-ever public demonstrations in Bolivia. The situation was so dramatic that 'Morales was barred from even travelling to Santa Cruz in 2008 due to threats of violence' (Eaton 2011, 307).

The conflict is a struggle between the economic elites from the lowland provinces (where the Bolivian fossil resources and big agribusiness are located), who seek to defend the *status quo* as well as 'their' hydrocarbons, and the new government led by President Morales, who has a redistributive agenda, particularly to improve the lives of the poor in

the highland departments. Santa Cruz contributes 40% of Bolivia's tax revenue (Rochlin 2007, 1334); therefore, its inclusion in the Bolivian national state is crucial for the government's redistributive agenda. Historically, it was the other way around: parts of the profits from the mining industry in the highland were invested to develop the Bolivian lowland. With the discovery of natural gas in the 1970s this changed, and the lowland departments, particularly Santa Cruz, became the most important economic regions in Bolivia (Camacho 2012).

According to Eaton, the conservative autonomy movement aims for greater fiscal autonomy and 'a different development model from that endorsed by the national government ... by demanding substantially more room for market forces'. Furthermore, the movement asks for 'deeper institutional and policy changes', among them 'the transformation of regional councils into legislatures with law-making authority ... regional control over land tenure to protect agribusiness and to prevent the national government from redistributing land ... [and] greater subnational control over public security'. Eaton concludes that the movement 'stops short of separatism ... but for most participants' autonomy does not imply sovereignty but rather greater independence ...' (2011, 294).

Taken into account the described political environment in Bolivia between 2006 and 2008, it is understandable why the *Economist* commented on FIFA's ban issued on 26 May 2007, that 'Evo Morales must have been delighted' (*Economist* 2007a). According to the *New York Times*, the ban gave Morales 'an opportunity to act as a unifier of his otherwise fractious country' (Romero 2007).

The FIFA decision offered Morales an unexpected window of opportunity to demand something (a repeal of the ban) that almost every Bolivian could agree on. Morales seized this chance for deflecting a variety of internal and external political problems of his country, starting by calling for a cabinet meeting one day after the FIFA decision was issued to discuss the government's reaction towards FIFA. After the meeting, Morales said: 'He who wins at altitude, wins with dignity. He who fears altitude has no dignity'. He labelled FIFA's measure 'an attack against the legitimate right of the communities and violation of international rights guaranteed by the United Nations'. In cooperation with a media group in La Paz, a plan was unveiled to send one million letters of protest to the FIFA President (Ordonez and McDonnell 2007). Morales called upon the citizens of the highlands of Bolivia to participate in a mass demonstration on 30 May 2007, armed with footballs (Will 2007).

Another cornerstone in mobilizing the population and uniting the country was a unanimous decision in Bolivia's Constituent Assembly. As the *Guardian* commented,

ever since Evo Morales became the first Indian President of Bolivia last year, the country has been separated into factions: right against left, rich against poor, Indians against westerners, pro-Morales against anti-Morales. Nowhere has the divide been more apparent than in the Constituent Assembly, where the President's failure to hold the majority has created a quagmire in which it has seemed impossible to agree on any issue whatsoever for months - until FIFA banned matches at over 2500 m and the entire assembly voted to fight the decision. (Orihuela 2007)

The next step in Morales' campaign was a football match in mid-June 2007 with the President and his staff on Bolivia's highest mountain Sajama, 6000 m above sea level. This unusual match resulted in pictures circulating the next day in the domestic and international media showing a President scoring the winning goal at a football match on a snow-covered mountain (Romero 2007). Included in the newspaper articles was the following quote from the President said right after the match: 'Wherever you can make love, you can play sports' (*Associated Press* 2007).

When public interest in the issue started to dissipate, the campaign of Morales presented a new, highly publicized highlight: in March 2008, President Morales played a charity match together with the Argentinean football legend Diego Maradona in the Estadio Hernando Siles in La Paz. After the game, Maradona said that if a 47-year old could play there, so could fit young professionals: ‘All of us have to play where we were born, my brothers and sisters. Not even God can ban that . . . much less Blatter’ (Marcotti 2008).

When Bolivians travel from the lowland to the highland, they usually drink coca tea to counteract the negative health effects of the altitude. In January 2013, the United Nations agreed that traditional uses of the coca leaf in Bolivia would no longer be considered illegal under a UN anti-drug convention (Neumann 2013, A.7). However, consuming coca before matches in the highland violates the FIFA doping rules (Villegas 2012). As Bolivia is a member of FIFA and the domestic league is played under FIFA regulation, the teams in Bolivia are subject to adhering to these regulations. This resulted in another reason causing the ban to be a sensitive issue: FIFA was on the one hand banning matches because of the negative health effects of the altitude and on the other hand not allowing the consumption of coca, a protection against these negative health effects that has been successfully used by Bolivians for centuries, a contradiction that from the Bolivian point of view made no sense. Whereas the use of coca for the cocaine production is a highly controversial issue, the use of the plant for tea or, for example, producing shampoo is common in Bolivia, regardless of region or social class.

The external political processes

Banning high-altitude football matches has been debated for decades. The pressure to ban high-altitude matches has mainly come from the leading South American football nations Argentina and Brazil, both playing international home matches in the lowland (Buenos Aires is 30 m, Rio 5 m above sea level) and often struggling at matches in the Andean altitude. Argentina, for example, was winless in Bolivia between 1973 and 2005 (Orihuela 2007). After every defeat in international matches and in the *Copa Libertadores*, the debate about high-altitude matches started again, but a ban was never implemented. In 1993, after losing a World Cup Qualifier in La Paz, Brazil started strongly lobbying for a ban of high-altitude matches, but in the end failed to convince FIFA.

Until 2007, only Bolivia (La Paz, 3577 m), Ecuador (Quito, 2800 m) and Colombia (Bogota, 2600 m) played international matches above the new limit of 2500 m. Peru used to play its international matches in Lima, which is only 90 m above sea level. At the beginning of 2007, however, Peru announced that it may be holding World Cup qualifiers against stronger teams in Cuzco, a city 3400 m above sea level (Orihuela 2007). This meant that 4 out of 10 CONMEBOL members would be playing international matches in high altitudes.

The FIFA ban gave the Bolivian president the opportunity to deflect not only internal, but also external problems, particularly from political tensions that existed at that time with Brazil. In May 2006, Bolivian President Morales announced that he would nationalize the country’s energy resources. The main victim of this decision was the Brazilian semi-public corporation Petrobras, the largest company in Latin America controlling half of the Bolivian gas market. Bolivia holds, after Venezuela, the second largest natural gas reserves in South America. Fifty percent of the gas consumed in Brazil comes from Bolivia. The most important economic region of Brazil, Sao Paulo, receives more than 70% of its gas from Bolivia. The nationalization did not mean that the foreign

companies such as Petrobras had to leave Bolivia, however. The Bolivian government negotiated agreements with all foreign companies that would allocate the government rents between 50% and 82% (Lambert and Papacek 2006; Rochlin 2007, 1331).

Part of Bolivia's nationalization programme in May 2006 was also a 'recuperation' of two major Petrobras petroleum refineries, one in Cochabamba and the other one in Santa Cruz. According to Rochlin, 'Petrobras's bitterness regarding the loss of these key refineries was expressed publicly on a number of occasions' (2007, 1331). Brazilian newspapers called this the 'Bolivian crisis' (Lambert and Papacek 2006).

Another reason for the more and more critical perception of Bolivia among the Brazilian public was Bolivia's cooperation with Venezuela. Venezuela and Brazil are struggling for hegemony in South America; both countries are following different development models, with Brazil following a more moderate social democratic approach leaning on European experiences, whereas Venezuela is adopting a more leftist approach.

The USA was the main ally of previous Bolivian governments. But now, under Morales, Bolivia joined the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), which is an alliance of socialist countries that was formed by Venezuela and Cuba in 2004. The *Economist* labelled ALBA an 'anti-American alliance' (*Economist* 2012a). In 2012, ALBA was comprised of eight member states from Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2006, Bolivia, under Morales, was the third country to join the alliance (*Alianzabolivariana*). ALBA seeks to promote free trade between its member states and also facilitates other kinds of cooperation, among them Cuban doctors and teachers working in Bolivia and Venezuela, financing development projects in Bolivia, but also military cooperation between Venezuela and Bolivia.

While becoming an economic superpower on the global scale (being the sixth largest economy in the world in 2011), with the foundation and growth of ALBA, Brazil is losing political influence in the region. Furthermore, Venezuela holds the largest and Bolivia the second largest gas resources in South America. By cooperating, they are controlling almost the entire market for natural gas in South America. 'With the Chávez/Morales alliance Brazil's ambition of having a leadership role on the sub-continent is questioned' (Lambert and Papacek 2006). According to Rochlin,

Bolivia is not only a loyal ideological and strategic ally for Chávez, but Venezuela also plays the role of 'big brother' or benefactor to ultra-poor and politically divided Bolivia. In that sense Bolivia is a protégé of the Venezuelan socialist experiment. (2007, 1337)

However, as some of the interviewed experts emphasized, the money for the programme 'buddy Evo' that finances development projects (such as building schools and hospitals) in Morales' main supporter base, the rural areas, is not a donation from Venezuela. Rather, it is a credit with preferable conditions that must be paid back. If the government in Venezuela changes, the future of this programme, one of Morales' most important development projects, is open (Zavala 2012).

It was amidst this anti-Bolivian climate in Brazil – with Brazilian companies being nationalized and expropriated in Bolivia and Bolivia's cooperation with Brazilians' biggest rival for hegemony in South America, Venezuela – that the FIFA ban on high-altitude football appeared on the political agenda in South America.

Coming back to Bolivian President Morales and his campaign against the ban, in addition to mobilizing the domestic population, he started to form transnational alliances on the issue. On 6 June 2007, he invited majors from 20 affected cities of 6 Andean nations (Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Venezuela and host Bolivia) to La Paz to coordinate the protest against the FIFA decision. One of the outcomes of the meeting was a declaration to

CONMEBOL (Quiroga 2007). There were other diplomatic successes: the Organization of American States – an organization established in 1948 of 35 states of the Americas (including Brazil, Argentina, the USA and Mexico) – officially criticized FIFA’s decision. The Andean Community of Nations (AN) – a trade bloc representing Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru – sent a protest letter to FIFA’s President Sepp Blatter. Morales met in mid-June 2007 with CONMEBOL, reaching an official common statement that FIFA should reconsider its ban on playing matches at altitudes of more than 2500 m.

According to CONMEBOL President Nicolas Leoz, there was ‘solidarity among South American nations in opposition to “a ruling by FIFA that I would say is transitory”’ (Webber 2007).

At the end of June in 2007, Morales met with FIFA President Sepp Blatter. Morales said after the 40-minute meeting: ‘I’m very happy with the meeting. I’m going to hope for the best’. FIFA issued a statement saying that it was in the process of studying the petition (*New York Times* 2007).

However, FIFA tried to divide the alliance formed by the Bolivian President and weaken Bolivia’s resistance. At the end of June 2007, right after the meeting between Morales and FIFA President Sepp Blatter, FIFA raised the altitude limit from 2500 m to 3000 m and announced an exemption for the Estadio Hernando Siles for the next two years, allowing it to continue holding qualifying matches for the World Cup 2010 in South Africa. After the World Cup 2010, Bolivia should use a stadium at lower altitude.

In December 2007, FIFA changed its ruling regarding the altitude limit again, saying that it would be from then on 2750 m. One influential football association would then no longer be affected: Colombia, playing international matches in Bogotá at a height of 2600 m (Chumacero 2009, 619). In March 2008, FIFA again debated the issue, but confirmed its previous decision (Marcotti 2008, 17). But the protests against the ban did not stop, and Bolivia threatened to sue FIFA at the UN and the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), an international arbitration body set up to settle disputes related to sport (Henkel 2008). Finally, in May 2008, FIFA President Sepp Blatter said the prohibition ban had been provisionally lifted, while further studies were conducted on the effect of high altitude as well as extreme heat, cold and humidity: ‘Let us reopen the discussion’, Blatter said (Carroll 2008).

Conclusions

The anti-ban campaign by Bolivian President Morales was successful, lifting the ban only 13 months after its promulgation, because Bolivia was able to ally with other affected nations, mobilizing its own population and gaining sympathy in the international media and people worldwide with a creative campaign. After FIFA decided in December 2010 that the 2022 World Cup would be hosted by Qatar, a desert country, the success of the anti-ban campaign might be permanent; nobody expects FIFA to try banning matches under certain conditions again. If it did so after granting the World Cup to Qatar, FIFA would lose all its credibility. But FIFA could require that matches take place at night and not in the afternoon, when the effects of the altitude (and, at other locations, the heat) are highest (Bolivians like to play international matches in the afternoon which was never forbidden by FIFA). However, maintaining the right to play in the altitude is no guarantee for the success of Bolivian football, as the Bolivian football legend Eduardo Villegas emphasized when interviewed. Bolivia’s main football successes were winning the Copa America (a continental championship in South America) in 1963 and taking second place in 1987. However, both tournaments took place in Bolivia. Apart from this, the country

qualified only once for the World Cup (in 1994 in the USA). Therefore, Villegas might be right that the heated debate does not take into account that there are other more important factors such as the infrastructure and the professional organization of the football association, for example (Villegas 2012).

Bolivian President Morales put so much effort into the anti-ban campaign because it offered him a window of opportunity to deflect domestic problems and tensions in foreign relations. But did the success of the campaign against the FIFA ban have a longer-lasting effect on the internal and external problems of the Andean state? In addressing this question, one needs to differentiate between the domestic and the international spheres. In mid-2012 (when this research was conducted), there were no longer concerns about secession and a possible civil war in Bolivia. It is difficult to measure to what extent football (or, more precisely, Morales' campaign against FIFA's ban to play international football matches in high altitudes) contributed to reducing the tensions within Bolivia that mainly existed between the predominantly poor highland population and the old economic and political elites from the lowland. Other factors might have been more important in achieving a longer-lasting effect: apart from concessions (private land ownership was limited to a maximum of 5000 ha; however, this did not apply to already existing property ownerships) in the new constitution of 2009 which passed in a referendum in January 2009 with a support of 61.4% (Hölscher 2009), most important for this development was that Morales was now compromising with the old economic elites from the lowlands, following now a distributive rather than a redistributive agenda. The increasing revenue from the fossil resources sector, caused by a combination of factors (among them the higher taxes paid by foreign companies after nationalization and increasing world market prices), made it possible to initiate ambitious social programmes without generating the money for these programmes through redistributive policies. Income taxes were not increased, private property of Bolivians was not expropriated and the planned land reform was only realized through small measures, rather than sweeping reform (mainly by distributing state-owned land). Therefore, critics from the left argue that socialism has not been established in Bolivia because private property has not been nationalized (apart from that of foreign companies) (Camacho 2012).

Most members of the old elite have cooperated with the new government after securing their privileges, saying 'we do business but not politics' (Mansilla 2012). However, the new government has not initiated a process of reconciliation, as was done in South Africa, for example. In addition to carrots dangled by the Morales administration (such as no redistribution and maintenance of privileges such as low taxes and large land possession), sticks were also waved:

In 2010 it used its legislative majority to approve a law that requires elected officials to be suspended from office if charges of any kind are filed against them, even before any evidence has been presented in court. (*Economist* 2012b)

Opposition governors and mayors, among them the mayors from Potosi and Sucre, have been ousted in this way. Another effect of this legislation was that many opposition politicians left the country, asylum for about 200 of whom was granted by Brazil (Camacho 2012). In June 2012, Brazil granted Roger Pinto, who led the opposition in Bolivia's Congress, political asylum. It was the first case in which a Bolivian opposition politician sought asylum in the Brazilian embassy in La Paz since democratic governments took power in 1983. Pinto, who is from the lowland state of Pando, claimed that his allegations of drug trafficking and corruption against the government of Morales made him a target of political persecution. Pinto has been hit with some 20 lawsuits and criminal

investigations for crimes such as defamation and sedition since the Morales administration began making the allegations (Lyons 2012).

Within his own supporter base (which is strongest in the rural areas), the Morales government has attained some success: poverty levels have fallen in South America's poorest country since Morales became President in 2006; the monthly minimum wage has been increased; Cuba has provided doctors to Bolivia; and a housing programme with low-interest loans has been initiated. As incentive for going to school, a bonus is paid every year for each child in public primary schools. The sustainability of these measures is another issue that will not be discussed in this work. What happens if the world market prices for oil and gas go down? Many critics of the government argue that investments in Bolivia's infrastructure would be therefore more sustainable than the mentioned payments. What happens if the main buyer of Bolivian natural gas, Brazil, one day becomes energy autonomous? This objective was formulated by the Brazilian government. Bolivia is highly depended from its neighbours, particularly the largest South American economies Brazil and Argentina, because the country is landlocked and therefore not able to export with shipments liquid natural gas to other countries all over the world (Dargatz 2012).

The support for Morales Movement for Socialism (MAS) is growing. In 2009, Morales was re-elected with 62% of the votes (53% in 2005). The MAS achieved a majority in the Chamber of Deputies as well as in the Chamber of Senators where the opposition previously held a majority. Even in Santa Cruz, Morales achieved 43% of the vote. Due to the continuous migration to Santa Cruz of Aymaran and Quechuan highlanders who support the MAS, current conditions are favourable for the party. It is possible that the MAS will also take over the lowland departments in the medium term. After main conflicts such as the discussed redistribution of land were resolved, main future conflicts might be not between government and opposition but within the MAS. One group, the Without Fear Movement (MSM), already separated from the MAS and won the elections for mayors in some cities in April 2010, among them La Paz and Oruro. The main supporter bases of the MAS at those local elections remained in the rural areas. 'If Evo is not the candidate, the MAS will have difficulties winning an election', one interviewed expert said (Käss 2012). However, in April 2013, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that Morales is allowed to run for a third consecutive presidential term in 2014, despite the constitutional two-term limit, because his first election took place under a previous constitution (*Economist* 2013).

Within the MAS, there is a conflict between the development model of the government that is based on the extraction of natural resources for financing social programmes and the protection of mother earth that is of holy importance for many indigenous communities. The protests against the construction of a highway through ancestral land (Isiboro Sécore National Park and Indigenous Territory, TIPNIS) might give an indication of future conflict lines in Bolivia that might occur within the MAS, a broad alliance of different stakeholders, rather than between the highland population and the lowland opposition with the old (and new) economic elites. Among the indigenous communities that make up constituencies within MAS, there are also groups with different interests. There are indigenous people who have been living for centuries on their land and there are indigenous people who migrated from their land for economic reasons. The first group seeks to preserve its territory, whereas the latter is more concerned about its economic opportunities (Käss 2012).

While for the government the state is the key player in the planned redistribution of power and wealth, many indigenous people want to have the main power located within their local communities. But the new constitution gives the indigenous judiciary only limited responsibilities (Thomaß 2013).

There is a growing distance from intellectuals; one of the main reasons apart from the traditional growth model is the more and more authoritarian style and the cultural conservatism of the government (Mansilla and Dargatz, interview with D. Reiche).

When it comes to the international sphere, Morales' football diplomacy was only temporarily able to deflect the tensions in the foreign relations with other countries such as Brazil and Spain, the main victims of expropriations. One reason is the ongoing nationalization of foreign companies (Minder 2012, B.4). By taking a number of decisions including cooperating with Venezuela and also with Iran, who is interested in Bolivian Uranium and has signed up to \$1.2 billion in joint ventures and currently has the largest foreign embassy in La Paz (*Associated Press* 2009); ordering the American Ambassador to leave the country in September 2008 (accusing him of helping groups seeking greater political autonomy in eastern Bolivia) and the US Agency for International Development on 1 May 2013 (*Economist* 2013); and voting against sanctions for Libya and Syria in the United Nations General Assembly in 2011/2012, the country has found its place in a small group of anti-American countries such as Nicaragua, Ecuador, Cuba, Venezuela and Iran, and has never again been able to ally with as many countries as in the campaign against the FIFA ban in 2007/2008.

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Note

1. Since 2009, the official name of the country is the 'Plurinational State of Bolivia'. For reasons of simplicity, I will only use in this article the term 'Bolivia'.

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