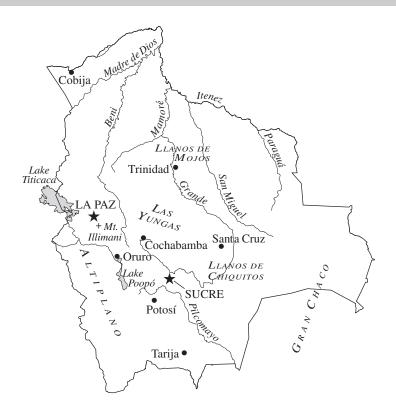
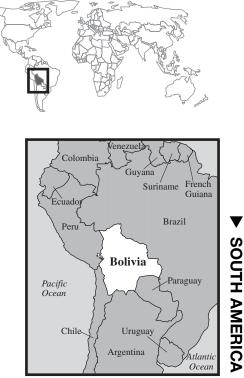
Culture Grams 2006



Republic of Bolivia



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Located in the heart of South America, Bolivia is a landlocked country of 424,165 square miles (1,098,582 square kilometers); it is almost three times the size of Montana. There are five distinct geographical areas: the high, cold, and dry mountain-rimmed Altiplano to the west; Las Yungas, a region of medium-elevation valleys northeast of La Paz and Cochabamba; the agricultural highland valleys in the center of the country; the Gran Chaco, a vast subtropical plain shared with Paraguay and Argentina; and the *llanos* or *el trópico*—wet, hot, forested lowlands in the east and northeast. Grasslands are common on these lands, which makes the area good for cattle ranching. Forests cover about half of Bolivia.

The Andes Mountains, which run north-south through the country, climb to more than 21,000 feet (6,401 meters). They are permanently covered with snow above 16,000 feet (4,800 meters). The famous Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable body of water in the world (12,500 feet, or 3,810 meters), lies on the north end of the Altiplano. The country has two main seasons. Summer (November–April) is the rainy season. Winter is from June to September. In La Paz, the average annual temperature is $65^{\circ}F$ (18°C).

Unlike most countries, Bolivia has two capital cities: La Paz is the main capital, where the president and legislature are located; Sucre is home to the country's highest courts. When Bolivians refer to the capital, they are talking about La Paz.

History. The Tiahuanaco civilization inhabited the area near Lake Titicaca between 1500 B.C. and A.D. 1200. Aymara and other groups were conquered in the 1400s by Incan armies, bringing the area into the Inca Empire. The Incas introduced the Quechua language and a new social system. The Spanish began their conquest in 1532, and by 1538 all of present-day

Bolivia was under Spanish control. Countless indigenous people died in forced labor. Known as Upper Peru during Spanish rule, Bolivia was one of the first colonies to rebel. Political uprisings occurred frequently in the 1700s but were always crushed. It was not until the independence movement of 1809 that Upper Peru began to see success. After the 16-year War of Independence, the area gained autonomy on 6 August 1825 and was named after its liberator, Simón Bolívar.

Bolivia's first president was overthrown in 1828, and the country experienced decades of factional strife, revolutions, and military dictatorships. Much of its original territory was lost between 1879 and 1935 in wars with Chile, Brazil, and Paraguay. The War of the Pacific (1879–84) was most significant because Bolivia lost its access to the sea. The lack of sea access has restricted Bolivia's economic growth. Bolivians have regularly appealed to Chile for the return of the territory. In 1992, Peru granted Bolivia access to the sea via the Ilo port in southern Peru. With this access, Bolivia hopes to increase foreign trade.

The government attempted to improve conditions and stabilize the country during the 1950s, but a military coup ended the reforms in 1964. A series of coups brought various dictatorships to power, each of them oppressive to the indigenous majority's population. From 1971 to 1978, Hugo Banzer Suárez led an authoritarian military regime that was credited with creating economic growth but criticized for human-rights abuses. Economic conditions worsened through the 1980s, characterized by spiraling inflation that peaked at 11,700 percent in 1985.

After other leaders stepped down, a representative democracy was finally established in August 1985 with the election

Bolivia

of President Víctor Paz Estenssoro. He reduced inflation to less than 20 percent and stabilized the economy. His term ended peacefully in 1989, when Jaime Paz Zamora was elected.

Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada became president in 1993. Significantly, his vice president, Victor Hugo Cárdenas, was Aymara—the first indigenous person to rise to such a high office in Latin America. Sanchez de Lozada worked to integrate indigenous groups into society, but his plans to export Bolivias vast stores of natural gas drew public protests, which eventually forced him to resign.

The country continues to struggle to end the cycle of poverty, curb the practice among poor farmers of growing coca plants (cocaine base) as a cash crop, and reduce injustice against indigenous peoples.

THE PEOPLE

- **Population.** Bolivia's population of 8.7 million is growing at about 1.6 percent annually. About one-third of the population lives in rural areas. La Paz has more than one million people and Santa Cruz has about the same number. Nearly 70 percent of the total population is of indigenous ancestry, including Quechua (30 percent), Aymara (25 percent), Guaraní, Mojeño, Chimane, and smaller groups. Some 25 percent of the people are *criollo* (or mestizo), who are of mixed indigenous and European heritage. Another 15 percent are of European descent. Quechua Indians are prevalent throughout the country, but are especially concentrated near Cochabamba and Sucre; the Aymara are concentrated in the Altiplano.
- Language. *Castellano* (Spanish), Quechua, and Aymara are all official languages. Spanish is used in government, schooling, and business and is the native tongue of about 40 percent of the population. Most people speak some Quechua. Indigenous groups speak their own languages, especially in rural areas. However, Quechua and Aymara are often liberally peppered with Spanish words. Many indigenous people from rural areas who move to cities speak Spanish with their families to avoid stigma. Many young indigenous-language speakers also speak Spanish.
- **Religion.** Approximately 95 percent of the people are Roman Catholic. Some indigenous belief systems and an active Protestant minority (*evangélicos*) are also present. Bolivians of the Altiplano mix Aymaran and Quechuan traditions with their Catholic beliefs. For instance, reverence for *Pachamama*, or goddess Mother Earth, is popular. People toast to her or bless things in her name. A *ch'alla* is the blessing of any material possession or event by offering symbolic articles and alcohol to *Pachamama* and *Achachila*, gods of the mountains. Homes in rural areas may be given a *ch'alla* every year at *Carnaval*.
- **General Attitudes.** In Bolivia, time is viewed differently than in North America. People enjoy getting as much pleasure out of an experience as possible, with less regard to how much time they spend. Scheduled events begin late, as all understand that arriving on time is not expected. The Aymara view the past as something they can see in front of them but the future as unseen and therefore behind them.

Bolivians admire honesty and frown upon those who are too proud and who flaunt or talk excessively about their wealth. They do not like confrontation and avoid disagreement. Kindness, gentleness, and concern for another's welfare are keys to friendship in Bolivia. Bolivians like to remind others that they are also "Americans" because they live in South America. They call people from the United States *norteamericanos*. Divisions exist between societ's upper classes—Europeans and mestizos—and indigenous groups, who have often been barred from participating in society because of their race. Those who have wanted to assimilate into society have had to speak Spanish and change their way of dress. Many also adopt Spanish names. The indigenous movement is working to ensure that all the benefits of a democratic society are extended to all citizens without forcing them to abandon their traditions. People of European and mestizo ancestry tend to believe that other groups should assimilate into society by leaving tradition behind and adopting a more Westernized culture.

Personal Appearance. How Bolivians dress depends on where they live and their social class. Generally, urban residents wear Western-style clothing. Children dress neatly for school. Having clean shoes is very important. Many women wear a *pollera* (a full, colorful skirt). Rural women (called *cholitas*) wear a *pollera* with a *manta* (shawl). They often wear their hair in braids and may wear bowler derby hats, bonnets, or stovepipe hats, depending on where they are from.

Some indigenous people make their clothing out of wool. Common colors include red, black, and off-white. Native men might wear shin-length pants, a shirt, and a thick leather belt. They often wear a *poncho* and a hat. Women wear a long, darkcolored dress tied at the waist with a colorful belt. They also may wear a small shoulder cape and oval hat. Women carry babies on their backs in an *aguayo* (a woven square cloth).

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. Spanish-speaking Bolivians greet friends and acquaintances with a cheerful *¡Buenos días!* (Good morning), *¡Buenas tardes!* (Good afternoon), or *¡Buenas noches!* (Good evening). To say How are you? you could say *¿Cómo estás?* in Spanish, *Imaynalla kanki* in Quechua, or *Kamisaki* in Aymara.

In Spanish, one adds the title *Señor* (Mr.), *Señora* (Mrs.), or *Señorita* (Miss) for first-time introductions or when greeting strangers. *Señorita* is used for any woman, unless she is older or the speaker knows she is married. Bolivians show respect for a person by using the title *Don* (for men) or *Doña* (for women) before his or her first name. Rural people (*campesinos*) even use these titles with close friends. Strangers do not call each other by first name.

Greetings are accompanied by a handshake. However, if a person's hand is wet or dirty, he or she may offer an arm or elbow. It is important to greet everyone in a home. In cities, greetings for both men and women are always accompanied by a kiss on or near the cheek. Bolivians maintain little personal space and stand close during conversation. Close friends and relatives frequently greet with an *abrazo*. It consists of a hug, a handshake, two or three pats on the shoulder, and another handshake. Female friends often embrace and kiss each other on the cheek. They commonly walk arm in arm. Spanish farewells include *Hasta luego* (Until later) or the casual *Chau*. *Adiós* implies good-bye for a long time. In southern areas, *Adiós* is also used as a quick greeting when people pass on the street. In both Quechua and Aymaran *Q'ayaqama* means See you tomorrow.

Gestures. Bolivians often use hands, eyes, and facial expressions to communicate. To beckon children, one waves the fingers with the palm down. Patting someone on the shoulder signifies friendship. A raised hand, palm outward and fingers extended, twisting quickly from side to side, states "There isn't any" or "no"—a gesture often used by taxi and bus drivers

when their vehicles are full. Waving the index finger indicates a strong "no." One covers the mouth when yawning or coughing. Eye contact in conversation is essential. Avoiding another's eyes shows suspicion, lack of trust, or shyness.

Visiting. Bolivians enjoy visiting one another. Both arranged and unannounced visits are common. Urban visitors generally give flowers or small gifts to the host upon arrival. Hosts might also present visitors with gifts, which are not opened in front of the giver. Hosts make their guests as comfortable as possible. Compliments given during the meal instead of after will bring a second helping.

Upon arrival, visitors are invited inside and offered a drink or light refreshments; refusing them is impolite. It is also impolite to start a conversation on the doorstep. Visitors staying a few days are welcomed with a hug and kiss on the cheek. Hosts provide special meals as a welcoming gesture, and if possible, all family members are present to greet the guests. Guests are not asked how long they will stay, as this is interpreted as a desire to have them leave soon.

Eating. Bolivian families eat most meals together. They typically have one large and two small meals per day. Rural families might eat four meals. Upon entering a room where people are eating, Bolivians often say Buen provecho (similar to Bon appétit). Everyone (including guests) is expected to eat everything on the plate. People eat meat with utensils, not hands. Generally, one is not excused from the table until all are finished eating. It is polite to say Gracias (Thank you) to all at the table when one finishes eating and to wish them Buen provecho upon leaving. Dining out is most common at lunch. In restaurants, the host typically pays for the meal. A tip is usually left when in large groups or in a nice restaurant in the city. Chicharias, bars indicated by a white flag hanging outside the establishment, serve chicha, a home-brewed alcoholic drink made from corn. Chicharias are an important meeting place, especially in the highland valley areas.

LIFESTYLE

Family. The family is central to Bolivian society. Middle- and upper-class families have one or two children. Poorer families traditionally are much larger, but children often die in infancy. While many rural couples live together in common-law arrangements, formal marriages are more common in cities. Children almost always live with their parents until they are married, and sometimes even after marriage.

Most women work in the home. Without modern conveniences, their work is difficult and time consuming. This situation can prevent women from pursuing work in the formal labor force, but many run small businesses (sewing, cutting hair, selling soda and other small items etc.) from their homes. Families in the upper- and middle-classes often have maids. While the father makes most family decisions, the mother exerts much influence on household affairs. Although children are taught the importance of education, illiteracy is high among the poor. Children generally are well disciplined and share in family responsibilities. The elderly live with their children's families.

Dating and Marriage. Chaperoned dating begins at about age 15. Dating is preceded by flirting. In many towns on Sunday (and other) evenings, young men and young women like to *dar vueltas* (take walks), where they walk in groups around the central plaza to make eye contact and flirt. The process of getting acquainted, dating seriously, and being engaged can take as long as three years. Men marry between the ages of 20 and

25, while women marry between ages 19 and 23. People usually do not marry until they have some financial security or property. For a marriage to be legal, a civil ceremony must be performed. However, most couples also have a religious ceremony, followed by a dance and reception. In rural areas, the celebration can last as long as a week. Because weddings are expensive, many rural people choose common-law marriages instead. Bolivians wear their wedding rings on the right hand.

- Diet. Potatoes, rice, milk products, fruits, and soups (which often include quinoa, a protein-rich grain), are common staples in the Bolivian diet. Starches vary by region: vucca is eaten in the lowlands; corn is plentiful in the valleys; and potatoes are eaten daily in the Altiplano. Bolivia has hundreds of varieties of potatoes prepared in different ways. Chuños are freeze-dried potatoes that are used in soups or side dishes when rehydrated. Most foods are fried and seasoned with *llajua* (a spicy salsa). Peanuts may be used in soups (sopa de mani) and sauces. Chicken is the most common meat. Southern Bolivians eat a lot of beef and enjoy barbecues. Breakfast usually consists of tea or coffee, bread, and perhaps cheese. In rural areas, it might be a hot drink called *api* made of corn spiced with sugar and cinnamon. Lunch, the main meal, consists of soup and a main dish. In cities, people enjoy salteñas (meat or chicken pies made with potatoes, olives, and raisins) as a midmorning snack.
- **Recreation.** *Fútbol* (soccer) is the national sport. Other popular leisure activities include watching television (in urban areas), visiting with friends, and attending festivals. In the Chaco region, people get together to drink several rounds of *yerba mate*, an herbal tea. Dancing and singing are popular at various events.
- **The Arts.** Many of Bolivia's cultural traditions have their roots in pre-Inca civilizations. Textiles have changed little from those roots, often incorporating the same dyes and patterns that have been used for hundreds of years. Since colonial times, Bolivians have been using gold and silver to ornament architecture, jewelry, and other objects. Basket weaving and wood carving are common crafts in the Guaraní region.

Music is an integral part of Bolivian culture. Played and promoted throughout the world, it can be divided into three types: fast, happy rhythms from the east and northeast; slow, romantic, and melancholic rhythms from the Andes Mountains; and happy, romantic rhythms from the central valleys. Much of the music is characterized by distinctive instruments: panpipes (*zampoña*), vertical flutes, various percussion instruments, and the *charango*, a 12-string, guitar-like instrument made from an armadillo shell. The *cueca*, *tinku*, and *saya* are traditional dances.

Holidays. Holidays include New Year's Day, *Carnaval* (Saturday before Ash Wednesday), *Día del Mar*, or Sea Day (23 March, when Bolivians remember the war with Chile in which Bolivia lost ocean access), Holy Week before Easter, Father's Day (19 Mar.), Labor Day (1 May), Mother's Day (27 May), Independence Day (6 Aug.), All Saints' Day (1 November, a day for the family to clean and decorate ancestral graves and enjoy a picnic), and Christmas. On Christmas Eve, some children place their old shoes in a window for *Papá Noel* (Santa Claus) to take them in exchange for new gifts. Children also receive gifts on Three Kings' Day (6 Jan.).

Dancing, wearing costumes, and pouring water on people are common during *Carnaval*. The city of Oruro holds one of the biggest *Carnaval* celebrations in the region. Almost every *pueblo* (village) has its unique *fiestas* in honor of its patron

Bolivia

saint or the Virgin Mary. These local events are noted for their music and colorful costumes.

Commerce. On weekdays, business is generally conducted from 8 a.m. to noon and 2 to 6 p.m. The midday break, or *descanso*, allows people to have lunch and relax. Government offices often close without warning. Strikes, known as *paros civicos*, occasionally interfere with business hours.

SOCIETY

- **Government.** The president (currently Carlos Mesa), the vice president, and the cabinet form the executive branch based at La Paz. *El Congreso Nacional* (National Congress), also in La Paz, consists of a 27-seat Chamber of Senators and a 130-seat Chamber of Deputies. The Supreme Court sits at Sucre, the legal capital. The president, vice president, and congressional representatives serve five-year terms. The constitution prohibits presidents from serving consecutive terms. Voting is mandatory at age 18.
- **Economy.** With natural resources such as tin, natural gas, crude oil, zinc, silver, gold, lead, and tungsten, Bolivia's major industry is mining. Others include coffee and food production, textiles, and timber. Roughly half of the labor force is engaged in agriculture. Coca (used in making cocaine) has been the largest (illicit) cash crop; however, a government plan to eradicate production has resulted in decreased coca exports. Government efforts to stop coca trafficking are complicated by the drug's lucrative profits and centuries-old status as a traditional crop. It has many legitimate uses in society, including medicinal and dietary, and is a fundamental part of the culture.

Bolivia is one of the poorest and least developed Latin American countries. Limited access to adequate health care, education, and economic opportunities affects the quality of life for most Bolivians, particularly those in rural areas. About two-thirds of the population lives in poverty. Improving conditions for poor and indigenous populations remains a longterm goal. Unemployment is high, and underemployment affects almost half of the economically active population.

Massive debt forgiveness by foreign creditors of more than 80 percent of Bolivia's external debt has given a boost to the country's economic potential. The economy is growing, albeit slowly, and inflation is decreasing as the government continues to cut expenditures. The currency is the *boliviano* (BOB).

- **Transportation and Communications.** Throughout its modern history, Bolivia has been handicapped by its landlocked location and lack of internal transportation and communications. Only a few major highways are paved. Airlines connect major cities and allow travelers to avoid rugged terrain. But buses, taxis, and trains are the most common forms of transportation. Buses are often crowded. More expensive minivans are faster and less crowded. Taxis often stop to pick up additional passengers going the same way. Several radio and television stations are in operation.
- **Education.** Schooling is free and compulsory for ages 5 to 18. However, school conditions are poor. Those with money send their children to parochial or private schools. Though illiteracy is declining, problems still exist. Less than half of all children complete their primary education, and less than one-third go on to secondary school. Strikes, long distances to schools, and

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DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	114 of 177 countries
Adjusted for women	92 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$2,460
Adult literacy rate	93 percent (male); 81 (female)
Life expectancy	62 (male); 66 (female)

family labor needs contribute to this problem. In the past, indigenous children could not receive instruction in their own language because Spanish was the language used in all schools. Recent reforms require bilingual education. There are about 15 universities in Bolivia. One must pass two entrance exams to be admitted to a university.

Health. Sanitation facilities are poor. Contaminated water is the most serious health threat. Tap water must be boiled, but wood is hard to find and gas is expensive. Many rural areas lack running water and electricity. Local nurses and doctors have been training *responsables populares de salud* (community healthcare workers) in basic skills. These trainees help serve the needs of the rural population. The infant mortality rate is high because of disease and widespread poverty.

Only about half the population has adequate access to medical care. Traditional medicine is used in many rural areas. Many illnesses affect the populace, including hepatitis, cholera, and Chagas, a parasitic disease that causes intestinal problems and early death by heart attacks. The AIDS threat is growing.

AT A GLANCE

Events and Trends.

- In October 2003, violent protests forced President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada to resign. More than 50,000 Bolivians protested his plans to export natural gas so that Bolivia could reduce its national debt and gain international aid. Many people believed the exports would be used to help the wealthy, while the poor would still be ignored. Up to 80 people died in the protests. A year later, the Bolivian congress voted to bring Sanchez de Lozada back from exile in the United States and try him for failing to quell the protests and stop the deaths.
- However, a July 2004 referendum showed that more Bolivians favored exporting the natural gas. So the new president, Carlos Mesa, signed a deal to begin exports. Then, in March 2005, he resigned, saying more protests had made his position impossible. But he later agreed to stay on after Congress refused his resignation and would not allow early elections.
- In June 2003, Bolivia announced the discovery of seven new species of frogs, lizards, and snakes in a remote forest valley. The government declared the area protected, but it is still threatened by logging and agriculture.
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