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Latin America's Shifting Politics

THE LESSONS OF BOLIVIA

Jean-Paul Faguet

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The decline of mainstream political parties and the resurgence of populism have been evident across continental Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States for some time now. These trends have grown to the point where they can no longer be written off as owing to charismatic leaders or particular issues such as immigration. Instead, something bigger and deeper is at work.¹ In Italy, all the major post-1945 political parties have been swept away. In France, both the Socialists and the traditional center-right have gone into steep decline. In the United States, there is upheaval in the ranks of both major parties.

Throughout the West, not just particular parties but entire party systems—arrangements that endured for most of a century and presided over vast changes—are fading fast. The old ideological and partisan divisions of left versus right and labor versus capital are losing their relevance. Veteran leaders can no longer stir their traditional bases, while charismatic newcomers (some fairly extreme) attract growing support. What is causing this? Is the process tied to deeper changes in society? What is likely to come next?

We are dealing with something new and complex. Predictions are not on tap. Yet odd as it may seem, there is a small country in the mountains of South America whose recent experience may offer analytical hints about the larger future. Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, and has never boasted a political system as highly institutionalized or parties as strong as those typically found in richer and more developed lands.² Yet Bolivia has had to cope with many of the same economic shocks, technological disruptions, and social and environmental changes that more developed countries have known. For

this reason, the disintegration of the political system in Bolivia began earlier and moved faster than elsewhere. With due adjustments for context, Bolivia can tell us something about how political disintegration works, and can offer us clues about where it may be headed in places far beyond a country of eleven million in the northern Andes.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, Bolivia's democracy was fragile but its party system was surprisingly robust. Why, then, did that system suddenly collapse early in the twenty-first century, as parties that had seemed fairly well entrenched gave way almost overnight to Evo Morales and his more loosely structured Movement to Socialism (MAS)? To understand this collapse and the new system that rose with Morales, we must first understand how the old system worked at its peak.³

Bolivia suffered many coups in its first 190 years of independence, but after 1953 its politics settled along a left-right axis typical of the twentieth century, with workers and peasants on one side and capital on the other.⁴ So dominant was this system that the same parties—indeed the same individuals—survived coups, civil disturbances, guerrilla insurgencies, bouts of hyperinflation, economic meltdowns, and striking social changes, returning again and again to hold the reins of power. Why did it all come undone in 2003?

Bolivia's 1952–53 revolution overturned an oligarchic political system and extended full citizenship rights and educational access to the exceptionally large share of the populace (more than 60 percent) that belonged to indigenous groups. The revolution quintupled the size of the electorate, broke up the *haciendas*, distributed land to the highland peasantry, and nationalized mines and other “commanding heights” of the economy. Following this sea change, national politics coalesced around four parties. These were the Nationalist Democratic Action (ADN) on the right for landowners, professionals, and big business; the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) and the Free Bolivia Movement (MBL) on the left for workers and peasants; and the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR), a multiclass coalition that straddled the center with support from certain unions, small and medium-sized businesspeople, and the professional intelligentsia.⁵ As late as the 1990s, this quartet would regularly win a combined 60 to 75 percent of the nationwide vote.

In some ways, this left-right system acted as a proxy for identity politics: Property owners on the right tended to be lighter-skinned, while workers and peasants on the left tended to be darker-skinned. But any such associations were secondary in Bolivia. As the parties' platforms made clear, their main appeals were pitched in standard terms of labor and capital, left and right.⁶ If anything, the main parties sought to repress identity as a political mobilizer. Indeed, the MNR initially espoused *mestizaje*—racial mixing—in order to create a new Bolivian ethnicity that would replace racially distinct groups.

The degree to which a few figures bestrode the political world is

hard to overstate. The 1952 revolution's leader, Víctor Paz Estenssoro, alternated in the presidency with his close MNR ally Hernán Siles Zuazo from 1953 until a military coup overthrew Paz Estenssoro in November 1964. The military regimes that ruled from then until 1982 tried several times to ban and replace the established parties, but failed abjectly. Once democracy was restored, the same parties and indeed the same leaders came back. Between them, Siles Zuazo and Paz Estenssoro filled the presidency until nearly the end of the 1980s, with the latter finishing his third and final term in August 1989 at the age of 81.

Even this recounting understates the elite's hold on power. For example, Jaime Paz Zamora of the MIR, who was elected to succeed Paz Estenssoro, had been Siles Zuazo's vice-president in the early 1980s. Likewise, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, who would twice be president, had been Paz Estenssoro's minister of planning. Hugo Banzer, the general who had been dictator during the 1970s, headed the coalition that sustained Paz Zamora in power and then served as Bolivia's elected president from 1991 to 2001, bracketed by the two nonconsecutive terms of Sánchez de Lozada. All these figures had ample formal schooling, came from wealthy urban backgrounds, and were of European descent.

Unforeseen Upheaval

After Sánchez de Lozada was forced from office and into exile by the "gas war" of 2003, the old system crumbled with stunning speed. In 2005, the MNR was the only one of the four traditional parties that was able to field general-election candidates, and it won only 6 percent of the vote; by 2009 it too had disappeared.

Where did these parties' voters go? In their heyday, the major parties had been surrounded by a cluster of tiny parties that denounced capitalism, the urban elites, and the "foreign, capitalist ideologies" of both left and right, promoting instead indigenous culture, indigenous forms of social organization, and indigenous rights.⁷ Altogether, these small "antisystem" formations never reaped more than 3 percent of the national vote. They were colorful also-rans in the stably dominant four-party system.

Why did the system prove so unstable so suddenly? The proximate cause was a proposed natural-gas pipeline through Chile, the old enemy that had condemned Bolivia to landlocked status by stripping away its coastal region in the War of the Pacific (1879–84). When Bolivian security forces used lethal force to put down large protests against the pipeline, the resulting crisis led to Sánchez de Lozada's resignation and flight. The massacre of protestors by the state was a grave and terrible event, to be sure, but in a country where social mobilization is high and protests common, how could a dispute over a pipeline overturn not only a presidency but the entire party system and indeed the dominant axis

of political competition? The parties and the system had survived far worse.

Most foreign observers blame fiscal shocks and poor economic performance, but those are not credible culprits. There was a deficit spike in 2002, but no spending cutoff or even drop (expenditures actually rose). The economy had been expanding since 1986. A system that had survived hyperinflation two decades earlier did not fall because growth was 2.7 percent and rising.

Cleavage Theory

In order to explain a political change as large as Bolivia's, one must do more than cite a passing event. Instead, one must find a cause that is consequential enough to account for the effect observed. A better explanation of what happened in Bolivia will draw a connection between the characteristics of political competition and the party system on the one hand, and, on the other, the deep factors that define Bolivian society. This is "cleavage theory," a signal contribution to comparative politics first set forth a half-century ago by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan.⁸ In trying to understand how parties position and reposition themselves in response to changing voter sentiment, Lipset and Rokkan rejected the fluid, continual, market-like adjustments postulated by the influential work of Anthony Downs.⁹ Instead, said Lipset and Rokkan, parties and party systems emerge in response to underlying sociopolitical cleavages in society. There is ideological and organizational "stickiness" in the process, and political cleavages can become "frozen" even as underlying social characteristics change. Hence adjustment, when it happens, may be more dramatic than what one would expect to see in a Downsian world of frequent, incremental changes.

What are these cleavages? In Western Europe, according to Lipset and Rokkan, two overarching historical processes produced four key cleavages. National revolutions split centralizing nation-builders from distinct ethnic, linguistic, or religious communities on the periphery, and also introduced a second cleavage, setting the newly centralized and centralizing state against the supranational Roman Catholic Church. Then the Industrial Revolution set urban-industrial interests against rural landholders before introducing an additional cleavage between workers and owners. Any society will contain further cleavages of varying depth and importance. But in Western Europe, it is (or until recently was) a story of center versus periphery, state versus church, urban versus rural, and labor versus capital. Political competition was traditionally defined by these fault lines.

Most of Europe's established political parties formed around these cleavages. At the cores of these parties were self-conscious groups that expressed the enduring identities of their members, as distinct from their

transient opinions or occupations. These collective identities gave rise to grassroots movements and hierarchical organizations that took sides in conflicts between peripheral communities and the nation-state, between secularists and the church, and eventually between workers and capitalists. Conflicts were enduring and often acrimonious because they revolved around deep social cleavages, with both sides featuring strong groups held together internally by a solidarity born of experience.

As seen through the lens of cleavage theory, Bolivia's political system did not fall apart in 2003 because a president was unpopular or even because a civil uprising broke out. The events of that year, rather, manifested something that was far deeper and far longer in the making. There was a tectonic shift that moved the axis of political competition into an alignment more closely matching the country's real fault lines. A contest of industrial workers versus capitalists never made much sense in a country that lacked both. Competition organized around contrasting cultural and ethnic identities made more sense in a society riven by both.

The 1952–53 revolutionaries had bequeathed the country a political ideology and style of discourse that mimicked those found in the more developed countries of the West. This may have been an aspirational move, and was certainly easy to defend at the time. But it was an awkward fit for a poor, agrarian society. How, then, did the post-1953 system last for so long? Two underlying but powerful institutional features explain its endurance. First, the revolutionaries placed high barriers to entry around the new system, especially via centralization. Second, in concert with this highly centralized administration, Bolivian politics was defined as national, not local. Any new party that emerged anywhere faced the impossible task of competing everywhere at once. The curious upshot was the decades-long freezing in place of a system premised on a set of postulated cleavages that did not match Bolivian reality.

What catalyzed change? Beginning in the 1970s, growing urbanization awakened the dormant cultural cleavage. Bolivians who had long lived spread out in remote villages moved to cities and began to feel the primacy of identity over class. But it was another institutional change—the adoption of sweeping decentralization reforms in 1994—that allowed the cultural cleavage to gain a keen political edge.

Before 1994, Bolivian politics had been highly centralized, with laws and financial arrangements that kept activity at the national level. In creating hundreds of new municipalities, decentralization also created hundreds of new, subnational spaces where local politics could unfold. In these new spaces, members of Bolivia's indigenous and *mestizo* majority could at last become political actors in their own right. Over time, new politicians emerged with their own agendas and messages and began to wield power at the local level. The irrelevance of the dominant system revealed itself to them not analytically but practically, as they worked to respond to their constituents and win elections. Over the course of a

decade, these new actors abandoned first the ideological discourse of the elite party system, and then the parties themselves.

In 2002, the dam broke. New parties began flooding the country. Bolivia went from having a handful of top-down parties run by urban elites to having almost four-hundred parties, most of them tiny and with ultralocal concerns, run by carpenters, truck drivers, shopkeepers, and farmers. The old system did not so much fracture as disintegrate from the bottom up. After a brief interval of unbridled party creation, small formations began to federate. Many gathered under the umbrella of the MAS.

The genesis and structure of the MAS are as important as its ideology. Unlike Bolivia's traditional elite parties, the MAS is a bottom-up phenomenon, first formed in the rural province of Chapare by displaced miners and farmers who had become militant *cocaleros* (coca-growers). President Morales's own career is illustrative. He was born in 1959 to a poor indigenous (Aymara) farming family in the Altiplano, the high, semi-arid Andean plateau that makes up the southwestern third of Bolivia. As a boy he herded llamas and worked at jobs such as baking and brickmaking to put himself through school. After compulsory army service, Morales returned to his village. But drought drove his family and thousands more to move east, down to the tropical lowlands of Chapare at the southern edge of the Amazon basin. From there, Morales's charisma and leadership skills carried him up the ranks of *cocalero* unions until he became executive secretary of their federation in 1988. In the mid-1990s, he helped to found the MAS.

The origins of the MAS lie in rural, highly local social movements of self-government, and agricultural-producer groups. From these roots, the MAS grew rapidly and achieved stunning electoral success by bringing hundreds of independent local organizations under its political umbrella. It incorporated new members in blocs via their grassroots organizations, allowing rural people—who were more often than not indigenous—to start acting on their own behalf. Its method was self-representation and its goal the electoral attainment of local and national power by the indigenous and *mestizo* majority. This set the MAS apart from the top-down organization and clientelistic appeals of the older parties, which had sought indigenous votes for politicians from the traditional social elites.

Of course, Bolivian identities are more complicated than “indigenous versus nonindigenous” or “indigenous versus Western.” As Raúl L. Madrid notes, Morales is more of an ethnopopulist than a strictly ethnic politician, and there are nationalist, leftist, and charismatic elements to his appeal.¹⁰ At bottom, however, what makes Bolivia's new politics different from its old is cultural identity. The former politics tried to subsume Bolivia's deep social divides in imported economic categories that failed to take root. The new politics comes out of rural society,

and is steeped in the symbols, languages, and heroes of village life. It not only recognizes but celebrates key characteristics of Bolivia's main identity divides. These divides have been written into the 2009 Constitution, which among other things changed the country's name from the Republic of Bolivia to the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and officially recognizes 36 indigenous languages alongside Spanish.

At the local level, the practice of politics rapidly evolved into something very different from the pursuit of power in La Paz. New actors competed for votes and exercised authority in terms of the major problems and demands that actually affected voters' lives. In a country such as Bolivia, these are born of poverty and inequality, discrimination, social and economic exclusion, exploitation, corruption, and oppression—phenomena natural to the deep ethnic and cultural divides that characterize society. The MAS's structure helped it sense these issues and identify grassroots responses. That structure also permitted grassroots groups to hold their local governments, the MAS, and even Evo Morales accountable on a continuing basis. Responding to demands coming from the bottom up, as the new actors did, moved politics off its fanciful left-right axis onto an axis that actually mirrors most Bolivians' experience.

After close to ten years of decentralization, Bolivia's old national party system was a house built on sand. No more than a shove was needed to make it fall. Protests against a pipeline to Chile applied that pressure, and the edifice toppled over.

Lessons for the West

What lessons does the Bolivian experience hold for continental Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States?¹¹ Although reasoning by analogy is speculative, it offers the advantage of a clear model of causality within a national framework that is consistent and contains all the relevant parts.

A first insight is that even solid-looking party systems can and do drift toward oblivion once they lose their moorings in the key issues and conflicts that voters care about most. Stories of political collapse tend to be told in terms of dramatic events such as wars and economic crises. These are not irrelevant, but they are also not essential. Political systems can and do collapse in peacetime, and when the economy is doing fairly well. What is key is the link between parties and social cleavages. Where it is missing, parties are doomed.

A second insight concerns the nature of these cleavages. The old worker-capitalist divide on which politics in the West has been based for a century or more appears increasingly obsolete. As manufacturing and heavy industry decline, they take with them a class of workers who strongly identify with each other against a common adversary. The changing nature of work, from a full-time, long-term commitment

between employers and workers to flexible, short-term “gigs” with few benefits or guarantees, plus increasing levels of informality across rich and poor countries, is further undermining the traditional opposition. We see this throughout Europe, where parties founded to represent industrial workers cannot hope to win elections, or even retain a purpose, when “workers as workers” shrink to a small fraction of the economy. This is why the current turmoil in France’s Socialist Party is not circumstantial, but existential. It also explains many of the current tensions in the British Labour Party, which is increasingly detached from its blue-collar base and seeks a new identity in a grassroots leftist movement called Momentum. Less dramatically, the German Social Democrats, the Dutch Labor Party, and other European parties of the traditional working classes face similar long-term declines in their voter bases.

Historically, U.S. politics was different, with two major parties—each a broad coalition—eschewing the organizational and ideological discipline typical of European parties. In recent years, however, U.S. parties have become more ideologically and discursively coherent. Republican and Democratic policy ideas and congressional votes cluster more systematically on the right and left, respectively, than they used to. The parties fudge their differences and overlap on policy less than they used to. It is ironic that their previously more diffuse ideological stances would have left them in a stronger position vis-à-vis the cleavage shift from below that they now face.

In Bolivia, the worker-capitalist divide was far less solidly grounded than has been the case in most Western countries, of course, and Bolivian politics was far less institutionalized. Hence Western party systems are unlikely to collapse as suddenly as Bolivia’s did, although individual parties may sink quickly.

Third, Bolivia illustrates how hard parties find it to change their core values and positions, because they have invested so much in building reputations based on these values and positions. For different but complementary reasons, both politicians and activists oppose large shifts. Hence as society changes, parties tend to get left behind—even when the changes are the result of the parties’ own policies. Political-system change tends to take the form less of adaptation than of replacement: Older and more established parties cannot or will not change; as they become irrelevant, new parties arise to push them aside.

From the Ashes of the Establishment Parties

When established parties fail, what is likely to replace them? In which underlying social cleavage will a new kind of politics anchor itself? This is difficult to predict for societies where the transition is less advanced. Perhaps a new economic divide will appear, based not on workers versus capitalists, but on some other opposition that has importance and

meaning to large numbers of voters? Such a cleavage would need to be not only relevant, but compelling to these voters. In highlighting one cleavage, a political entrepreneur must speak of it in a way that seems more urgent and convincing to more voters than the ways in which rival parties speak of their own favored cleavages. In the West today, as in Bolivia, the most compelling narratives revolve around race, ethnicity, and place.

The new politics will play out differently in different countries depending on their histories and social compositions, and on how the identitarian cleavage interacts with a distinct geographic cleavage (as per Lipset and Rokkan). In countries where no group is dominant, party systems may gel around identity as such, with parties representing particular groups, perhaps with larger groups at either end and smaller coalition-makers between. But where one group is a majority, a new axis of competition may emerge pitting this group's party against a more cosmopolitan one that denies or downplays identity differences. In Europe and the United States today, we see relatively cosmopolitan parties (at least in the sense that they seek to appeal to multiple identity groups) doing well in major urban areas while populist and even nativist politicians fare best in smaller cities, towns, and rural areas. Suitably adapted, we see this pattern also in Bolivia, where indigenous politics is strongest in the western highlands, the seat of Bolivia's ancient civilizations, while an opposition far less invested in race or ethnicity is strongest in the migrant-rich eastern lowlands. This is the fourth insight.

In historical terms, this is an extraordinary reversal. The Western Enlightenment believed in universal human equality. Liberalism sought to overcome identity-based cleavages. In France and the United States, classical liberals sought to found national identity itself on shared ideals rather than skin color or cultural traditions. Parties arrayed on a left-right axis were accessible to everyone, regardless of identity. For decades we have taken this as given. But it is useful to remember that an open, inclusive politics in a multiethnic democracy is a hard thing to achieve. The danger now for the West is that a new politics will be forged around identitarian cleavages of race, religion, ethnicity, and language. This would vindicate Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis,¹² and possibly mark the failure of the liberal project.

Fifth, any new politics of identity is bound to be far more exclusive, built on categories that only some can access. This would represent a danger not just for affected societies, but for democracy as an ideal. The reason is that the sorts of compromises among competing factions that must happen if democracy is to work are easier to find in the economic realm, where the main factions define themselves and their interests in quantifiable material terms. Add technological and organizational change that grows the economic pie, and mutually beneficial policy outcomes become readier to hand. For example, the acute revolutionary

pressures that many Western countries faced in the nineteenth century were eased by making schooling, healthcare, and welfare more widely available. These reforms not only improved the lives of workers, but also made them more productive. “Investment in human capital” was a virtuous circle, a positive-sum game that benefited laborers and capitalists alike.

Mutually beneficial compromises are harder to find when identity is at stake. Divisions are more rigid, and rewards more often positional, measured in terms of status. As a result, such contests tend to be zero-sum. Consider, for example, special preferences for government jobs in India and Malaysia. If Dalits and ethnic Malays are preferred, they must, by definition, be preferred over other groups; some win at the cost of others losing. Positive-sum games are harder to find in this sort of politics, as are spaces for democratic compromise.

Sixth, what are likely triggers of political realignment in the West? In Bolivia, the trigger was the institutional shift to decentralization. This not only changed administrative arrangements, but created a large new category of politicians and transformed incentives throughout the system. In the United Kingdom, Brexit will likely cause even greater political, economic, and administrative upheaval than decentralization caused in Bolivia. Uncertainty will reign for years as the new rules are devised and their effects hit home. The incentives facing economic and political actors will change significantly; many will lose and some will win. In EU countries (and their neighbors), the collapse of the euro or even the EU itself would surely have similar effects. Such environments pose threats to established parties and politicians even as they give political entrepreneurs chances to disrupt the establishment and launch new discourses and parties in new dimensions of political contestation.

Seventh, how will new parties emerge? In Bolivia, as we have seen, things happened from the bottom up, with villages and small towns the first to see change. The far richer societies of Europe and North America organize themselves differently, and their social relations follow different patterns. As many researchers have noted, “social capital” increases in Bolivia as one descends the social pyramid toward the poorest and least educated.¹³ In the West, by contrast, the poorest tend to be atomized while social organization and trust rise with income and education.

In the West, social media and modern communications technologies penetrate society in ways not often seen in rural Bolivia even today, let alone twenty years ago. If there is bottom-up emergence in the West, therefore, it will be digitally mediated. Facebook, WhatsApp, and the rest have already proven potent tools for organizing demonstrations, affecting electoral outcomes, and even overturning governments. In the West, nativist-populist politicians have proven especially adept at using social media to identify and mobilize supporters by spreading atavistic ideas about identity, race, and the dark threat of the unknown. Such

beliefs are easier to sustain in the cyber-vacuum of the internet, where wild-eyed accusers never quite face the accused. The dangers to the West as this type of connectivity supplants the traditional, face-to-face sort are manifest.

Eighth, why is political realignment around identity good for Bolivia, but likely bad for Europe and the United States? The first answer is that we cannot yet tell if it will be good for Bolivia. The events following realignment were positive for a surprisingly long time because when Bolivia entered the process, it was already in a deep hole. It was a poor, highly unequal society in which a small minority was marginalizing a coherent, historically dispossessed majority. Changing that situation required a politics suited to the society's principal cleavages—race, ethnicity, and language—which underlay and sustained the problem. The new politics has produced a regime that has so far been prudent, but also lucky: It has shown a macroeconomic restraint that has surprised many, but it has also been riding a natural-resource boom. In some ways, the entire history of postcolonial Latin America may be read as a cautionary tale about the fickle nature of such booms, and Bolivia has no magic exemption. Good times make governance easy; tough times test a government's character.

In Bolivia, this test is underway now, most visibly in the heated debate over Morales's attempts to hang onto power. Ironically, the term limits that have now been overturned were part of the very constitution that he championed to its final approval by referendum in 2009. In 2013, the popularly elected, seven-member Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal ruled that his first election, which took place under the 1967 Constitution, did not count against the two-term limit established by the new basic law. This allowed Morales to serve two more terms beginning in 2009. Morales was duly reelected in 2014 with more than 60 percent of the vote.

In 2016, in the context of a slowing economy, a rising deficit, and mushrooming corruption charges, the government proposed changing the 2009 Constitution to allow Morales to run for a fourth term. On February 21, voters in a referendum that drew 84 percent turnout rejected this by 51.3 to 48.7 percent. In November 2017, however, the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal overturned all term limits anyway, arguing that they violated Bolivians' human rights. Street demonstrations both for and against Morales's perpetuation in power ensued as rhetoric and political tensions grew heated.

Morales Unchallenged

The hard reality underlying this conflict is that in the new Bolivia, Evo Morales is *the* political giant. He rules the stage; all pretenders dwell in his shadow. Scores of leaders have used Bolivia's new cleav-

age to succeed at the local and regional levels, but no one can rival Morales's nationwide appeal. Since his first election, no opposition figure has come anywhere near him in approval ratings, and no electoral coalition has come close to defeating him. Surveys taken in early 2018 confirm this: In the wake of Morales's announcement that he would run for a fourth term, his approval rating plunged to 22 percent. Fully three-quarters of respondents rejected his indefinite reelection, yet he still outpolled all potential challengers.¹⁴

With a presidential election coming in 2019, no rival has stepped forward. The opposition fights hard on term limits because it cannot beat Morales at the ballot box. The MAS and its allies, meanwhile, know that as long as he is their standard-bearer, they cannot lose. Both sides dig in, refusing to compromise. A fourth Morales election, followed by protests, political strife, and legislative gridlock, is a distinct possibility. Bolivia risks a long slide into instability and sustained economic decline. Morales could alter this path singlehandedly, of course. But the forces urging him forward are powerful, and at this stage it is hard to be optimistic that he will yield.

The deeper answer is that the implications for the West are as different as these societies and their challenges are from Bolivia's. The likelihood facing the West is not that the "wrong" politics will give way to one more closely reflective of society, as in Bolivia, but rather that today's negotiable differences will harden into tomorrow's fixed cleavages. The risk is that the politics of identity will take one of the many ways in which citizens in the West differ from one another and, through sharp, polarizing, and eventually racist language, will create a new, hard social cleavage that divides us. Not so long ago, many in the United States saw both Catholics and Jews as "others"—foreign, poor, untrustworthy—who were unfit to join the local chamber of commerce or country club, let alone occupy the White House. Now both groups are mainstream liberals or conservatives, establishment stalwarts, and Americans. The mantle of otherness has lifted from their shoulders. That it could do so is a tribute to a twentieth-century politics that did not organize itself around such differences, did not make them essential. The demise of this politics, and the rise of identity clashes, threatens to alienate us from each other even as it removes the means for finding agreement. It is a sad and dangerous turn for the West that may forever change who we are.

NOTES

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