Hunger for Power and Order: Nonviolent Direct Action by a Bolivian Leader, 1956 and 1984

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Government leaders do not typically employ nonviolent direct action as a way to achieve their goals. However, from time to time leaders have adopted this set of tactics normally associated with opposition activity. For example, during the Contra War of the 1980s, Sandinista leaders employed a variety of nonviolent tactics in dealing with the opposition. And on January 30th, 1999, the 51st anniversary of the assassination of the most noted advocate of nonviolent direct action, Mohandas K. “Mahatma” Gandhi, Indian Prime Minster Atal Behari Vajpayee went on a fast of his own. Vajpayee announced that he was fasting as part of a drive to end attacks against the country’s Christian minority, and to emphasize the need for tolerance in general.

Hernán Siles Zuazo was particularly skilled at the use of nonviolence, and employed it both as an opposition leader and as President of Bolivia. As President he employed a wide range of nonviolent tactics, from threatened resignations to inserting himself as a human tripwire in the midst of violent riots. Perhaps the most important uses of these tactics were Siles’ hunger strikes in 1956 and 1984. The 1956 attempt was an avowed success, leading to the implementation of a radical economic stabilization program and the consolidation of Siles’ political power. The 1984 hunger strike ended in failure, resulting in the rejection of a radical economic stabilization program and the President’s early withdrawal from office. Why were there such drastic differences in the outcomes of the same tactic? Does the answer lie in the nature of nonviolent direct action, or in the fact that state actors, rather than societal challengers, were utilizing the tactic? What does this tell us about how state actors might employ tactics typically used by challengers? In order to answer these questions, we must first understand the nature of nonviolent direct action and how societal actors employ it, and then determine which factors should affect the outcomes of the use of nonviolent direct action by leaders.

What are Nonviolent Direct Action and Nonviolent Collective Action?

Political action includes both routine and direct action. Routine political action is acceptable within the institutional context, following an existing set of procedures or norms. Elections, diplomatic visits, and debates are common forms of routine political action. Direct political action operates outside of the institutional forms of politics. Examples include strikes, protest marches, and riots. Nonviolent direct action aims to achieve political goals extra-institutionally, but without resorting to physical coercion or other types of direct threats.
Self-risk is an inescapable element of nonviolent direct action. It is seen by most theorists and tacticians as the necessary price to be paid by the user for maintaining nonviolence. Users of nonviolent direct action appeal to their opponent and to a mass audience. These appeals “have primarily utilized emotional pressures induced through the nonviolent actionists’ own self-suffering, either at the opponent’s hands (as in withstanding repression) or at their own hands (as in fasts)”.

Those who study nonviolent direct action are almost always referring to nonviolent collective action. Nonviolent collective action is the use of nonviolent tactics by societal actors as they engage in contentious claims-making, usually against the government and/or some other societal actor(s). Nonviolent collective action is most often a weapon of the powerless, used to overturn the status quo. Those in power depend upon the “compliance and quiescence of less powerful groups” in order to rule. Nonviolent collective action works by withholding that cooperation from those in power. Everyday interactions and routines, previously assumed to be “proper, legitimate, or at the very least, inevitable” are disrupted. By challenging the very order upon which the status quo is based, nonviolent collective action threatens the power of the state and the order it has established. Thus the power of nonviolent collective action lies in the ability to disrupt everyday interactions, and thereby call into question the underlying political, economic or social order. Nonviolent direct action is ultimately the use of non-physical pressure tactics involving self-risk employed to undermine the existing order.

(How) Might Leaders Employ Nonviolent Direct Action?

Because most of the literature on nonviolent direct action sees it as within the action repertoire of dissenters alone, our understanding of nonviolent direct action is predicated on assumptions of the state as target and dissenters as actionists. However, some leaders learn of the utility of nonviolence through personal experience. After all, most social movement leaders who espoused nonviolent collective action had learned about it from earlier experiences - either their own or others. Many successful practitioners of nonviolent dissent have gone on to become state actors (Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, Corazon Aquino, Nelson Mandela, and the leader examined in this paper, Hernán Siles Zuazo, are but a few examples). Having added nonviolent direct action to their understanding of a successful action repertoire, it is possible that they might subsequently incorporate it into their repertoire of governance tactics. As Schock notes, “[p]rocesses of learning, diffusion and social change may result in the implementation of nonviolent action in contexts or situations historically characterized by violent contention.”

This possibility raises a series of new and potentially interesting questions: How might nonviolent direct action fit into this repertoire? How does nonviolent direct action work within the context of the other strategic choices available to elites? Is nonviolent direct action only effective on its own, or is it most effective in conjunction with other strategic choices? Does nonviolent
direct action as used by leaders work in the same way as nonviolent collective action as used by dissenters?

Nonviolence is Nonviolence is Nonviolence (One Tactic Fits All):

Many who study nonviolent direct action argue that, in order to be successful in achieving short-term goals, actionists must avoid violence at all costs. These theorists argue that nonviolent direct action only works when the user operates from a morally superior position. This includes, but is not limited to, avoidance of violent political action. Others focus on the tactical advantages gained by using nonviolent direct action. The success of nonviolent collective action is in large part reliant on the strategic interaction between the nonviolent challengers and the more powerful opponent(s).

As Zunes notes, insurgents choose nonviolence “with an eye toward making the regime’s exercise of its power advantage a liability and winning popular support.” If the regime does nothing in response to nonviolent protest that challenges the status quo, then the order upon which their rule is based may be delegitimized. If the regime responds with force against nonviolent protesters, it merely reinforces the image of unjust state oppression of the powerless. Bystanders might view this response as less legitimate, and might withdraw its support for those opposing the nonviolent actionists.

Gene Sharp, in his comprehensive, influential study of nonviolent action, sums up this perspective as follows:

The nonviolent actionists deliberately refuse to challenge the opponent on his own level of violence. Violence against violence is reinforcing. The nonviolent group not only does not need to use violence, but they must not do so lest they strengthen their opponent and weaken themselves. They must adhere to their own nonviolent “weapons system,” since nonviolent action tends to turn the opponent’s violence and repression against his own power position, weakening it and at the same time strengthening the nonviolent group.

Thus, whether for reasons of gaining moral high ground or a tactical advantage, many theorists argue that groups using nonviolent collective action must avoid doing so within a violent context. If we assume that nonviolent direct action works in a similar fashion regardless of who employs it, then we can develop expectations regarding a given tactics’ potential for success in the hands of leaders from what we know about when dissenters use it effectively. If the avoidance of violence appears to increase the probability of success of nonviolent collective action, one would expect the same tactic to be less effective if leaders choose to employ it within a repressive context (soon after, or in conjunction with, the use of repression).

**Expectation:** If a leader employs nonviolent direct action within a repressive context (soon after, or in conjunction with, the use of repression), then the nonviolent tactic is less likely to be successful. Conversely, in the absence of a repressive context, if a leader employs
nonviolent direct action, there is a greater chance that the tactic will be successful.

Given these arguments, accommodation of political opponents is not likely to have the same negative effect on the success of a leader’s use of nonviolent direct action as would repression. Accommodation is consistent with nonviolent direct action’s emphasis on finding peaceful methods of altering (even if only slightly) power relationships. Accommodation signals the state’s willingness to negotiate rather than to engage in conflictual interactions. Willingness to move the field of contention from the streets to the bargaining table may even preempt or substantially reduce domestic conflict. Moreover, the willingness to concede some points to dissenters does not cede the regime’s higher moral ground the way repression does. And the tactical advantage of the use of nonviolence is not squandered either. While there is no reason to expect that accommodation would substantially enhance the probability of success of nonviolent direct action, at the very least it should not impede its success.

**Expectation:** An accommodating context (implementing nonviolent direct action soon after or in conjunction with accommodation) is not likely to have a negative effect on the outcome of a leader’s use of nonviolent direct action.

The above arguments assume that the primary target of nonviolent direct action is the group or groups opposing the actionist (in this case, those opposing the state actor); that the goal is to convert the target to one’s viewpoint, and/or to demonstrate the injustice of the target’s position to others (including the population at large and an international audience); and that success is a result of the ability of the user of nonviolence to use the power of the target against them. If, indeed, these tactics function as nonviolent collective action does, then these assumptions may help us understand leaders’ use of nonviolent direct action. But what if the very nature of nonviolent direct action changes when used by the state instead of by dissenters?

**Nonviolent Direct Action in Context: Effects of State Adoption and Tactical Environment**

When state actors adopt nonviolent direct action, we expect them to do so to establish order rather than to challenge the status quo. It is highly unlikely that state actors would use nonviolence in the way that societal actors would -- to undermine or disrupt the current order -- as that would merely undermine their own position. Leaders have a vested interest in establishing and maintaining order, and many other polity members have vested interests in seeing the state maintain order. This is particularly true in times of acute crisis, when leaders are most likely to employ policies involving self-risk. So then, how might nonviolent direct action be useful to state actors under such critical circumstances?

Some have argued that nonviolent direct action is most effective in swaying
and mobilizing one’s own supporters. It is a way to energize unmobilized moderates around powerful symbols of self-sacrifice at a time of crisis, when the state must implement unpopular policies. It is also a way to demonstrate a high degree of commitment to the unpopular policy, and the willingness to fail at governance (and by extension, the maintenance of order) should the policy and the state receive little support from its base. It is a call for support at a crucial time, while signaling that the costs of failure would be too high to bear. These arguments assume that the primary targets of nonviolence as employed by state actors are the moderate polity members who prefer stability and order to change. The goal of nonviolent direct action is thus to mobilize that support base, to shore up ones political position on the issue at hand, and to strengthen rather than weaken the status quo. This is a very different use of nonviolent direct action than is described by theorists and practitioners of nonviolent dissent.

But nonviolent direct action on its own will not work to mobilize supporters. The state first needs to demonstrate that it can maintain order before it receives societal support that may require short-term sacrifices. If the state can successfully quell dissent and restore order, moderates will support the regime in a time of crisis. If the state shows that it can no longer maintain order, supporters, sensing an ineffectual and failing state apparatus, may abandon the regime in a time of need, or may decide that it is safer to wait and see how things play out. Mobilization of supporters in the context of massive dissent smacks of more unpredictable, unconventional politics. Mobilization of supporters behind a difficult policy choice in the context of a more orderly political environment may be more doable, as it is closer to safer, more conventional forms of politics. In sum, for nonviolent direct action by leaders to be successful, leaders need to insure that supporters are likely to rally around them and support their preferred policy. Leaders can insure that by first establishing order, insuring a safer, more conventional environment within which to mobilize moderate masses.

Leaders employ a variety of tactics in the course of creating and maintaining political order and control. State actors typically choose from a repertoire that includes normative or symbolic controls (things in daily life that “prompt people to abide by the rules of the game”), material or political controls (such as concessions and negative incentives), and physical controls (repression through legal threat or physical force). Scholars most interested in how leaders deal with dissent tend to focus on three primary elements of this repertoire – repression, accommodation, or no action. Leaders tend to employ a number of these strategies together or in sequence in dealing with dissent. Often one strategy is used to create more favorable political conditions or maximize the likelihood of success of some other policy choice. If nonviolent direct action functions as simply one other tactical tool within the leaders’ toolbox, then it is more likely to be effective when used in conjunction with (rather than in the absence of) other such policies. In short, leaders may find that nonviolence is used best as a flexible political tactic rather than as a moral imperative. Moreover, if the goal of the tactic is no longer restricted to the need to use
the power of the opponent against them, state actors may be able to employ nonviolence in conjunction with other more coercive strategies.\footnote{32}

If so, then restrictive repression against the opposition might not impede leaders from using nonviolent direct action effectively. The selective use of other tactics, including repression, may create an environment in which nonviolent direct action can be successful. Once dissent is effectively curtailed through the use of repression, the state can use nonviolent tactics to mobilize supporters and enhance its ability to implement difficult policy choices. By restricting the strategic space available to potential opponents, the use of selective repression may in fact limit their ability to respond effectively to subsequent self-risk protest. For example, restricting freedom of the press before engaging in a hunger strike might allow a leader to control news coverage of the event, and to frame the debate. Used in this way, nonviolent direct action could be thought of as merely another tactic in leader’s repertoire, to be used strategically in conjunction with other policies to achieve a desired end.

**Expectation:** A repressive context (implementing nonviolent direct action soon after or in conjunction with repression) does not necessarily have a negative effect on the outcome of a leader’s use of nonviolent direct action. In fact, restrictive repression may make a leader’s nonviolent tactic more likely to be successful.

Given this logic, accommodation may actually reduce the likelihood of the success of nonviolent direct action as employed by leaders. Government accommodation may signal that the opposition’s previous efforts were successful. These victories assure dissenters that further opposition will pay off.\footnote{33} Energies are expended accommodating opponents’ demands, rather than focusing on the actionists’ desired goal.\footnote{34} Moreover, accommodation may signal a regime’s vulnerability.\footnote{35} Thus accommodation, usually employed in order to appease and diffuse opposition, may have the unintended consequence of stimulating even more claimsmaking, dissent and domestic disorder.\footnote{36}

Accommodation can also be employed as a way of smothering opposition groups rather than appeasing them.\footnote{37} Ruling elites often accommodate in order to co-opt potential adversaries. Co-optation might lead to reduced opposition overall.\footnote{38} However, those usually co-opted are moderates, while those who remain committed tend to be radicals. When moderates are co-opted, radicals tend to escalate to more violent and disruptive tactics.\footnote{39} In short, while accommodation may decrease the number of dissenters and perhaps even the number of opposition events, it actually increases the severity of events and the resulting disorder.

Whether accommodation is a way of rewarding dissenters or co-opting them, the result of regime concessions is likely to be increased rather than decreased disorder. As such, moderate supporters are unlikely to rally around a weak regime during a severe crisis when called upon to do so by the regime’s use of nonviolent direct action. Dissatisfaction with a regime unable to maintain
order, reluctance to be on the losing side in an increasingly disorderly and unconventional political battle, and fear of the regime’s inability to protect them if they mobilize keep moderates from actively supporting the regime. In such an atmosphere, a leader’s use of nonviolent direct action is not likely to have the desired effect.

**Expectation:** If a leader employs nonviolent direct action within an accommodating context (soon after or in conjunction with accommodation), then the nonviolent tactic is less likely to be successful.

How nonviolence is used in conjunction with the rest of the state’s repertoire of social control is not the only factor that should affect the success of nonviolent direct action. Other potential factors include the relative size of opposing groups, the visibility of the nonviolent action, and the acceptability of the tactic within the political culture of the society as a whole. However, examining the use of nonviolence by the same leader in very similar circumstances can at least in part control for some of these confounding factors. As such, we can use such cases as a first cut in an attempt to begin to sort through these differing sets of expectations, and to help us to develop a clearer set of theoretical arguments, regarding the use of nonviolence by leaders.

**Bolivia: 1956 and 1984**

The cases under examination here are Bolivia in 1956 and 1984 – remarkably similar cases almost thirty years apart, with very different outcomes. In both cases instances of nonviolent direct action occurred within the same country – Bolivia. In each case the same specific tactic of nonviolent direct action, a hunger strike, was used. In each instance, the same leader – President Hernán Siles Zuazo – employed the tactic. The similarities do not end there.

In 1956 Bolivia was only four years removed from a revolution. The new Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) regime was shaky at best. The government was without many resources, but was forced into costly accommodation of the opposition in order to retain power. Nevertheless, opposition activity was on the rise. On the left, Hernán Siles Zuazo’s government faced opposition from small left-wing parties and from the unions, led by members of his own party including Juan Lechín Oquendo. On the right of the political spectrum, Siles confronted resistance from the right wing of his own party, and from the major opposition party, the Falange Socialista Boliviana (FSB).

In addition, post-revolutionary Bolivia faced severe economic woes, including steep declines in agricultural production and tin prices, dire poverty, hunger, skyrocketing unemployment, three-digit inflation rates, a drop in currency values, a dramatic increase in the cost of living, and rapid capital flight. The regime also felt pressure from the United States and the international financial community to impose a harsh economic stabilization plan. In this politically and economically uncertain environment, Siles
decided to implement the recommended stabilization plan.

The Bolivian government in 1984 was also a post-regime transition government. Bolivia was only two years removed from transition from military rule to democracy. Hernán Siles Zuazo had returned to elected office in 1982 as the leader of a loose electoral coalition, the Unión Democrática y Popular (UDP). As in 1956, Siles’ new government was again without many resources. It too was forced into costly accommodation of the opposition in order to maintain its shaky coalition government. Siles faced a threat from the left, as unions paralyzed the country with general strikes. On the right, an increasingly strengthened business association, the Confederación de Empresarios Privados (CEPB) pressured the government for changes in policy, and two major opposition parties, including the influential Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN), attempted to oust the President and his government via a constitutional maneuver. As in 1956, the possibility of a government failure raised the specter of the military returning to power.

Just as in 1956, the 1984 economic situation was dire. Hyperinflation crippled the economy. Bolivia was facing rapid declines in production in the mines and in agriculture, drought, food shortages, skyrocketing external debt, a devaluation of the peso, and the sixth highest inflation rate in world history. Again, the United States and the IMF put pressure on the Siles government to implement structural adjustment policies to control hyperinflation and pay down their external debt. Again, Siles decided to push for a harsh stabilization plan amidst an environment of political and economic instability.

The similarities of these cases enable us to control, to some degree, for factors that have been found to affect the success of nonviolent direct action. This is especially true of the factors related to the tactic itself. The use of the particular tactic – hunger strikes – was seen as a legitimate part of the contentious action repertoire in Bolivia in both periods. In fact, hunger strikes were a favorite tactic of many opposition leaders of all political persuasions, including Siles himself before and after his ascension to the presidency. In both 1956 and 1984 Siles engaged in the tactic in such a manner as to increase its visibility. Each time he fasted for four plus days, and each time there were daily updates as to the President’s health in the press.

Opposition to Hernán Siles Zuazo was in extremely similar across the two cases in many ways. The relative size of opposing groups in both cases was extremely similar, and substantial opposition came from both sides of the political spectrum. For instance, on the left, union membership and participation in anti-government action was extensive in both 1956 and 1984. Moreover, the labor union federation Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), the main opposition force on the left, followed the same political strategy in both 1956 and in 1984.

However, some important differences in the nature of the opposition in these two cases should be noted. For instance, the leadership of the left, Juan Lechín Oquendo in particular, played a somewhat different institutional role. In 1956 Lechín was both a key member of the government and MNR leadership, serving as Minister of Mines and Petroleum, as well as a founder
and Executive Secretary of the COB. In this dual role he found himself torn between the need to simultaneously support the revolutionary government and oppose its policies on behalf of the miners.\textsuperscript{60} Lechín led a series of miner strikes that helped to trigger Siles’ 1956 hunger strike, but he also was forced to ultimately settle for less that was demanded by the COB in order to insure his place within both the MNR and COB leadership.\textsuperscript{61} In 1984, Lechín had returned to his role as the leader of the labor movement, but was no longer a member of Siles’ administration. This difference in institutional responsibilities allowed Lechín to play a more purely oppositional and intransigent role in 1984.

While opposition on the right was extensive in both cases as well, the nature and composition of that opposition differed. In 1984, the right was more clearly established within civil society (given the rise of the CEPB), more representative of the private sector, better tied to the military, and better tied to and represented by political parties (most notably the ADN) than in 1956. In 1956 right wing opposition outside the MNR, most notably from the FSB, was more extreme, less established, and less representative of the disempowered oligarchic elite.\textsuperscript{62} Yet the prominence and influence of the right wing faction within the MNR in 1956, its representation of elements later found associated with the CEPB and the ADN, and its resistance to Siles’ policies, makes opposition on the right comparable if not constant across the two cases.

The strength and position of the military was also somewhat different across the two cases. Actions by elements of the military that had tried to prevent the MNR from legally taking power in 1951 discredited the military as a political institution. The 1952 revolution led to a reorganization of the armed forces that weakened it substantially, and put it under greater civilian control.\textsuperscript{63} Yet under Siles’ first presidency, the military returned to a place of national prominence as “a symbol of national sovereignty and defender of the nation’s interests.”\textsuperscript{64} After the 1964 coup the military gained resources and autonomy, and began re-establishing its old ties to the right. However, the difficult years of military dictatorship discredited the army,\textsuperscript{65} making it less able to exploit its political ties to the right wing political opposition during the 1984 crisis, and more likely to act at the behest of the state (though perhaps less likely to be called upon to do so than in 1956). Thus, while the military was stronger in 1984 than in 1956, in both cases it was still held at the sidelines of politics, isolated from its potential bases of support, and subservient to the state.\textsuperscript{66} Nevertheless, given that the military was the primary arm of the repressive apparatus of the state, differences in the nature of the repressive apparatus itself could potentially account for differences in outcomes in each case, and must be considered as a possible alternative explanation.

Finally, there was at least one other potentially important difference between the two cases. Siles was able to govern in both instances amidst opposition from within his own party as well as from other parties and movements. However, he had one key advantage in 1956 that he no longer possessed in 1984 – majority congressional support. While the legislature was designed to merely respond to Presidential initiatives by supporting or blocking them rather than by offering alternatives, it nevertheless was able
to play an obstructionist role when needed. The legislative majority in 1956 meant that Siles merely had to convince legislators in his own party to support his plan. In 1984 the lack of a congressional majority meant that Siles faced a more difficult task in convincing members of his own party, as well as other parties in the UDP coalition, not to block his initiatives. Yet the legislature did not pose an insurmountable obstacle to getting policies implemented. Siles routinely circumvented the legislature, often governing by decree – leading eventually to attempts by the legislature to remove him from office on constitutional grounds. Civil society groups recognized how ineffective the legislature was relative to the President, and frequently bypassed trying to influence legislators altogether in favor of trying to influence the executive directly.

In short, the 1956 and 1984 cases are remarkably similar, even given these notable differences in institutional context and makeup of the opposition. In both cases the same tactic, hunger strikes, was used in the same country by the same leader against opposition on both the left and the right, under similar domestic and international pressures. The tactic itself was considered legitimate and was highly visible in its use.

Hernán Siles Zuazo’s Hunger Strikes

The 1956 Hunger Strike

President Hernán Siles Zuazo took office in 1956 as the second President of post-revolutionary Bolivia. Only four years earlier Siles had helped lead the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) and their revolutionary coalition partners to victory over a repressive military regime. But the euphoria of the revolutionary victory had already subsided, replaced by near panic over the economic state of the country.

While post-revolutionary Bolivia faced severe economic problems, the government was nearly bankrupt, and thus unable to do much to alleviate these problems short of radical reforms. The MNR government had few resources to begin with, and spent much of what it had to accommodate various groups in society in the first years following the revolution. Fearful of losing the support of the powerful labor unions, the MNR had gone as far as granting them co-gobierno, or co-government status. This amounted to veto power by the unions over economic policy. Thus the MNR was unable to avoid dramatically increasing worker salaries and benefits despite the desperate state of the economy.

Government accommodation only spurred on more demands from labor. In addition, capitulation to labor angered the conservative elements of the political spectrum, including the right wing of the MNR. Siles was also feeling pressure from the United States and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), both of which were offering to provide aid to keep the Bolivian economy afloat. A joint USA-IMF commission, headed by George Jackson Eder (the United States’ representative to the IMF), drew up a radical stabilization plan. The USA and the IMF conditioned aid on Bolivian acceptance of the plan.
Despite the domestic political risks, Siles agreed to its implementation.\textsuperscript{75}

When labor leaders realized that the stabilization plan would require freezing wages and benefits, (including government-subsidized stores for mine workers) opposition activity escalated further. Work stoppages and general strikes crippled the economy.\textsuperscript{76} The administration faced challenges from the \textit{Falange Socialista Boliviana} (FSB), a radical rightist opposition party, as well as from other right-wing elements in the MNR itself.\textsuperscript{77} In addition, Siles could not count on support of his own centrist base within the MNR. Most party leaders were reluctant to be associated with economic austerity.\textsuperscript{78} Vice President Ñuflo Chávez Ortiz went so far as to denounce the stabilization plan,\textsuperscript{79} and later resigned in protest after its implementation.\textsuperscript{80}

In the run-up to implementation of the stabilization plan, Siles eschewed his previous policy of pacification by accommodation. The Siles government dealt first with opposition from the right. After particularly bloody riots in September 1956, Siles declared a state of siege, but ordered that the protesters not be shot.\textsuperscript{81} Over 200 FSB members were arrested. Many FSB leaders sought asylum in the embassies of various Latin American countries.\textsuperscript{82} While the extremists on the right were now successfully under control, the moderates, most notably the Church and business leaders, were kept happy by the pro-market provisions of the stabilization plan.\textsuperscript{83}

Next, Siles dealt with opposition on the left. The continuing anti-stabilization package strikes convinced Siles to extend the state of siege indefinitely.\textsuperscript{84} In addition, the administration began declaring many strikes illegal, coercing a number of less committed labor groups into calling off planned demonstrations. The police began to disperse the remaining labor protests with tear gas, often followed by mass arrests.\textsuperscript{85} Nevertheless, labor unrest continued, led primarily by Juan Lechin and the powerful union umbrella organization, the \textit{Confederación Obrera Boliviana} (COB).\textsuperscript{86}

In a final attempt to convince his previously apathetic and unmobilized backers in the center and right to support the plan, as well as to quell the unrest from the left, Siles went on a hunger strike on 28 December, 1956.\textsuperscript{87} Supporters from all sectors of society began to rally to Siles’ cause, arguing the administration’s position vociferously for the first time.\textsuperscript{88} According to one account:

\begin{quote}
Newspaper interviews with the man in the street and resolutions and declarations by oil workers, newspaper employees, chauffeurs, printers, factory workers, youth movements, Chaco War veterans, gold mining cooperatives, miners in numerous individual mines, MNR “cells,” small-town councils, cattle growers, farmers, and others, filled the columns of the daily press.\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

By New Year’s Day, 1957, top members of the MNR who had previously shied away from the package were convinced to sign a proclamation that the entire party stood in unity behind the stabilization plan. The hunger strike also succeeded in ending the strikes and getting the miners back to work.\textsuperscript{90} Indeed,
among the signers of the unity proclamation was Juan Lechín Oquendo, head of the COB. Most impressive of all was the shift in overall public opinion in Bolivia. By the end of the incident, support for the economic stabilization program rose by almost twenty percentage points.

The 1984 Hunger Strike

Late 1984 found Bolivia in chaos. It had been only two years since the transition to democracy, and only four years since the last successful military coup attempt. In the face of hyperinflation and a deteriorating economy, the Siles administration tried unsuccessfully to implement economic stabilization packages eight separate times. Each time, large-scale protests by labor forced the government to back down. Siles refused to use repressive tactics to deal with the popular protests.

I don’t care if I’m judged as indecisive or a bad administrator. What’s important to me is having my hands clean of repression and that history recognizes the extent of my commitment that Bolivia continue to be a land of free men.

Instead, the administration attempted to mollify the protesters. Siles announced a 40 percent reduction in taxes, a 30 percent raise in mine workers’ salaries, and the implementation of forced price reductions on basic necessities. Yet none of these attempts at accommodation stemmed the rising tide of protests.

Siles’ refusal to repress the labor/left dissenters, coupled with the administration’s continued capitulation to labor demands, led to increased wariness on the part of the middle class and the right wing parties in the legislature. The Confederación de Empresarios Privados (CEPB), a coalition of business groups, responded by mobilizing anti-government and anti-labor rallies. By September of 1984, both labor and business associations were calling for general strikes to counter one another, nearly crippling the already devastated economy.

As pressure mounted from below, two major right wing parties attempted to remove Siles from office. Siles had attempted to ignore his stiff opposition in the legislature, often governing by decree in order to deal quickly with the escalating economic crisis. In addition, the right wing parties felt that the government was giving in too easily to labor’s demands. Faced with the inability of the government to implement a stabilization package in response to hyperinflation, and the perceived illegalities of Siles’ governing style, the legislative opposition tried to impeach the President.

In a desperate attempt to regain support for his government and for the stabilization package, Siles went on a hunger strike, as he had done nearly thirty years earlier. This time, however, the labor strikes continued and the right wing parties refused to back down from their attempt at a golpe constitucional. Siles’ physical condition worsened, and no end to the impasse was in sight. Finally, on the fifth day of the hunger strike, the Catholic Church
intervened. In return for an end to the President’s hunger strike and a cessation of political action by opposition groups, the National Council of Bishops hosted an all-party conference in November of 1984.

The result of these brief negotiations was the premature end of the Siles presidency. Siles agreed to step down a year early and to hold elections in June of 1985. Opposition activity, especially by labor, continued throughout the rest of Siles’ term, making it nearly impossible for the government to do anything about the economic crisis. A lame duck, Siles was unable to implement any economic stabilization plan. Such a plan was finally implemented during the administration of Siles’ primary legislative opponent and successor, Victor Paz Estenssoro.

**Analysis and Conclusion**

Hernán Siles Zuazo’s 1956 hunger strike succeeded in galvanizing support for his regime, and for the politically risky, but economically necessary, stabilization measures. The hunger strike succeeded despite – and likely because of – the use of restrictive repression by the government in quelling protest and eliminating elements of the opposition. Moreover, eschewing accommodation in favor of repression seemed only to bolster the President’s effectiveness. Conversely, Siles’ 1984 hunger strike had been a spectacular failure. The President was unable to end opposition strikes and protests, was unable to garner support for and implement a stabilization package in the face of a crippling economic crisis, and was forced to give up power a year early. The hunger strike failed despite a concerted attempt by the President to eschew repression in favor of accommodation.

These cases suggest that the assumption that tactics have similar characteristics, functions and dynamics regardless of user may be incorrect. In neither case was Hernán Siles Zuazo attempting to use nonviolence to change the current order, nor was he primarily targeting the government’s opposition or trying to use the opposition’s power against them. As a result, his use of nonviolent direct action in a repressive context did not lead to failure of the tactic. In fact, the use of restrictive repression to neutralize the opposition, coupled with the use of nonviolent direct action to mobilize supporters, seemed in this case to be an effective tactical combination. Similarly, an accommodating context appeared to make his use of nonviolent direct action less successful.

Are there other explanations for these findings? As noted earlier, the cases are not exactly comparable. Perhaps the strength of CEPB within civil society, coupled with a lack of a legislative majority played a greater role than did the repressive/accommodative context in reduced Siles’ ability to neutralize opposition in 1984. Perhaps Juan Lechín, freed from governing responsibility, was better positioned in 1984 to help the labor/left opposition hold out against Siles than he was in 1956. Perhaps differences in the repressive apparatus played a greater role than given credit for earlier. All of these explanations are possible, though many are problematic, as discussed earlier. None seem
as convincing as the role that tactical context plays in affecting the success of nonviolent direct action by leaders.

The limited but compelling evidence presented here suggests that nonviolent direct action may play a substantially different tactical role when adopted by leaders. Rather than targeting dissenters with nonviolence, these cases suggest that leaders may use nonviolent direct action to activate supporters. Rather than being used to overturn the current order, leaders seem to use nonviolence to entrench the status quo, but only after first re-establishing order. To be effective, nonviolent direct action operates within the context of the leader’s repertoire of social control.

Leaders have a wider array of tactical choices than was previously thought. While not a normal tactic in a leader’s repertoire, Siles’ hunger strikes demonstrate that nonviolent direct action is both possible and potentially useful, particularly in a severe crisis. If leaders wish to employ this set of inherently risky tactics successfully, they may be best served by viewing them as mobilizing tools that work in conjunction with the rest of their tactical options. That raises another important issue presented here - that tactics are likely to differ in effect depending on how they interact with other tactics within the actor’s repertoire. Tactical context matters when determining the likely effectiveness of a particular strategy.

These cases also suggest that tactics created by one set of actors may function entirely differently in the hands of another. If nonviolent direct action becomes almost entirely unrecognizable and in need of a unique understanding once it diffuses from dissenters to state actors, then perhaps the same is true of other tactics of contention. Nonviolent direct action changes target, goal, function and dynamics when adopted by leaders. Can the same be said of accommodation, terrorism, or massacres? This study suggests the need to better understand how tactics of contention change function and dynamics depending on who employs them and how they are employed. It also suggests reconsidering how leadership affects the outcomes of political and tactical choices.

Notes
3. See, for instance, Hispanic American Report, January 1957; April 1957; October 1957; March 1958.
4. See Karen Rothkin and Doug Bond, “Recovering Events from Events Data”, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science...


13. Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action. See also Gene Sharp. Social Power and Political Freedom (Boston, 1980); Piven and Cloward, Poor People’s Movements; McAdam, Political Process...


17. There is an ongoing debate about how to measure success of nonviolent direct action beyond the achievement of short-term goals. See for instance, McCarthy, “Nonviolent Action,” pp. 7-14; Burgess and Burgess, “Justice Without Violence”, p.23. However, even Gandhi recognized the ability to the philosophy-in-action to be used successfully as a tactic to achieve short-term gains. See Weber, “The Lesson from the Disciples”, pp. 195-214. Hence, we focus on success in the short run in this study.

18. See, for instance, Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action, p. 709; Sharp, “The Importance of Strategic Planning,...”


20. Yet as Ackerman and DuVall note, “Few who relied on nonviolent sanctions in the twentieth century did so because of a principled attachment to nonviolence.” See Ackerman and DuVall, “Nonviolent Power in the Twentieth Century”, p. 147.


26. Elites in power have two preferences that supersede all others – to stay alive, and to stay in power. Survival (political or otherwise) is thus the primary concern of politicians. See for instance: David Easton, A Framework for Political Analysis. (Englewood Cliffs, 1965); David R. Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection. (New Haven, 1974); Ted Robert Gurr, “War, Revolution, and the Growth of the Coercive State”, Comparative Political Studies, 21, 1
(1988): 45-65; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Randolph Siverson, “War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability”, American Political Science Review, 89,4 (1995): 841-855; Krain, Repression and Accommodation. While other policy goals may be important to those in power, leaders understand that these ends cannot be achieved without their ability to retain that power. See Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson, “War and the Survival of Political Leaders,” p. 842. Migdal argues: “No agenda is worth anything if its sponsor has not lasted through the hazards of politics. Political survival, the central issue occupying the attention of state leaders, is the prerequisite for achieving any significant long-term social change.” See Joel S. Migdal, Strong Societies and Weak States (Princeton, 1989), p.226. Therefore, we would expect that leaders would engage in tactics that put their health, well-being or position at risk only in the most extreme of circumstances. As Weyland notes: “People tend toward highly risky behavior when confronted with threats to their well-being... crises trigger bold actions.” See Kurt Weyland, “Risk Taking in Latin American Economic Restructuring: Lessons From Prospect Theory.” International Studies Quarterly. 40, 2 (1996): 189.

29. McAdam and Tarrow, “Nonviolence as Contentious Interaction”; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, Dynamics of Contention.
32. We can even see hints of this tactical flexibility in some cases of nonviolent dissent. As Beckwith notes, “nonviolent and violent tactics in collective action have often been employed simultaneously.” See Beckwith, “Nonviolence and its Consequences,” p.5. For example, violent reprisals are sometimes threatened against those who might break solidarity with nonviolent challengers implementing a boycott. See Seidman, “Blurred Lines”, pp. 165-166. In South Africa, effective regime repression of the nonviolent campaign convinced opposition parties of the need to develop both nonviolent and violent wings to successfully undermine the apartheid regime. See Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom (Boston: 1994). See also Seidman, “Blurred Lines”.
34. As Sharp notes: “opportunities for advancing one’s cause will go unutilized;
the opponents’ initiatives will determine the course of events; the weakness of one’s own side will grow and have detrimental effects on the attempt to achieve the goal; and the efforts to reach the goal will have very little chance of being successful.” See Sharp, “The Importance of Strategic Planning…”


36. For example, government concessions increased both violent and nonviolent protests during the Iranian Revolution. See Rasler, “Concessions, Repression, and Political Protest”.


38. With many of their demands satisfied, and with more immediate access to the state granted, opposition groups have a harder time convincing potential members of the urgency of action. Additionally, co-optation provides the state with a way to keep an eye on the opposition groups. Advance warning of opposition plans can then allow the state to act to preempt the opposition, thereby short-circuiting opposition activity before it begins. See William Gamson. *The Strategy of Social Protest*. 2nd Ed. (Belmont, 1990): p. 116.


44. Many experts on Bolivian politics in the period suggest that the factions within the MNR acted as much as an opposition as the formal opposition parties in the legislature. Additionally, although still part of the MNR as of 1956, the right wing soon broke off and formed its own party, the MNRA. See Mitchell, *The Legacy of Populism in Bolivia*, p. 79.


51. For a detailed account of the level of collective protests against the Siles government in this period, see Catherine M. Conaghan and James M. Malloy, Unsettling Statecraft: Democracy and Neoliberalism in the Central Andes. (Pittsburgh, 1994), p.123.


53. Bolivia has experienced more coups than any country in the world. See Eudoro Galindo Anze, El fracaso del “presidencialismo”: causa principal de una tragedia histórica. (La Paz, 1994), p.12. In both of the instances examined in this paper (the crises in 1956 and 1984), the threat of a coup was real. In fact, both regimes had already foiled a number of failed coups before the event in question. The most notable of these attempts occurred in the summer of 1984, when Siles was actually kidnapped by a rebel army faction, but was soon released unharmed. For more on this incident, see: Associated Press, “Bolivian President is Kidnapped, Then Freed, in an Aborted Coup”, The New York Times, July 1, 1984: A1; Reuters World Service, 1 July 1984; Gary Prado Salmón y Edgar Claure Paz, Han secuestrado al presidente. (Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 1990).


57. See, for instance: Lawrence Whitehead, “Bolivia’s Failed Democratization,

60. Dunkerley, Rebellion in the Veins, pp. 89.
62. I owe this point to comments made by an anonymous reviewer.
67. Siles’ experiences influenced constitutional reforms intended to insure majority congressional support. After 1985, presidential candidates who received a minority vote had to face election in congress, creating the necessity for building a legislative coalition and encouraging coalition politics. See John Peeler, Building Democracy in Latin America (Lynne Rienner, 1998), Ch. 3.
70. Klein, Bolivia, pp.233-34.
71. Krain, Repression and Accommodation, 73-74; 138-41.
73. For a detailed account of the specifics of the stabilization plan, see: Eder, Inflation and Development in Latin America; Antezana Ergueta, Hernán Siles Zuazo, p.69.
78. Queiser Morales, Bolivia: Land of Struggle, p.84.
79. For a discussion the opposition’s criticism of the stabilization plan, see Ñuflo Chávez Ortiz, El signo del estaño. (La Paz, 1961), pp.109-55.
80. Resignations and/or threatened resignations were another set of common
nonviolent pressure tactics employed by post-revolutionary Bolivian leaders, including Siles, once and future President Victor Paz Estenssoro, and labor leader and Senate President Juan Lechín Oquendo. Ñuflo Chávez Ortiz resigned on 17 August 1957. He subsequently withdrew his resignation, but not before the Bolivian legislature accepted it. Chávez was left with little choice but to leave office. See: Hispanic American Report, September 1957; Antezana Ergueta, Hernán Siles Zuazo, pp. 69-77; Crespo, Hernán Siles Zuazo, p.204.

81. For more on the FSB protests, Siles’ reaction, and the aftermath, see: Antezana Ergueta, Hernán Siles Zuazo, p.42; Mantilla Cuellar, El estado del 52, p.17; Crespo, Hernán Siles Zuazo, p.200.


83. Crespo, Hernán Siles Zuazo, p.204.


86. Antezana Ergueta, Hernán Siles Zuazo, p.66; Crespo, Hernán Siles Zuazo, p.204.

87. New York Times, 29, 30 December 1956. Siles had apparently decided upon this course by mid-December. The President chose to respond by using tactics familiar to the labor unions. According to Eder’s account, Siles declared: “Whenever the workers want something, they go on strike. Now they are going to find, if they refuse to support me, that I am going out on strike too.” See Eder, Inflation and Development in Latin America p. 264.


89. Eder, Inflation and Development in Latin America p. 301.


92. Eder admits that there may have been some problems with the surveys, but overall appears to consider the results truly reflective of changes in popular opinion. See Eder, Inflation and Development in Latin America, pp.303-304. Others have suggested that while the public did eventually come to support the stabilization measures, this change in public opinion took longer to come about. See for instance, Crespo, Hernán Siles Zuazo, p.204.

93. For the specific details of these packages, see UDAPE, Análisis de la gestión económica en Bolivia, 1982-1985. (La Paz, 1985).


96. Perhaps Siles gambled by “giving away the store” because he understood that union opposition could doom both the stabilization plan and the government itself. In fact, Ibáñez suggests that this was the only choice available to the regime. “Since there was no reason to expect concessions from the COB, and given that it was impossible or counterproductive to break off relations with the union, they had no choice but to give in systematically to the
97. Gamarra Zorrilla, Bolivia: crisis y subdesarrollo, pp. 98-100; Ibáñez Rojo, “The
UDP Government”, p. 190, 201 (fn. 56).
Conaghan and Malloy, Unsettling Statecraft, p.124.
100. See Conaghan and Malloy, Unsettling Statecraft, p.125. The formal reason
given for the procedural move was that Siles authorized negotiations with
the head of a major cocaine smuggling operation in an attempt to end the
country’s drug trade. See United Press International. “Bolivian Leader Starts a
103. See: Reuters World Service, 30 October 1984; H. Muller and F. Machiado
(eds.), El diálogo para la democracia. (La Paz, 1986); Galindo Anze, El fracaso del
“presidencialismo”, p.17; Gamarra Zorrilla, Bolivia: crisis y subdesarrollo, p.104.
104. Gamarra Zorrilla, Bolivia: crisis y subdesarrollo, p.104; Ibáñez Rojo, “The
UDP Government”, p. 198.
106. Conaghan and Malloy, Unsettling Statecraft, p.126.
107. While support for the measures increased in the short term, clashes between
the administration and labor over these same issues continued throughout the
late 1950’s. Indeed, some have argues that in the long run, the combination
of policies employed by Siles actually contributed to an undermining of the
MNR’s power base. See Mitchell, The Legacy of Populism in Bolivia, pp. 67-68.