

Ethnographic Note on Municipal Governments in Bolivia, Panama, and Zambia

Brian Norris
Denison University

Municipal government is essential to the democratic development of 44% of the world's population who live in developing countries, and understanding the origins of well-functioning municipal governments is important. Small-N, qualitative comparison of municipal governments in rural Bolivia, Panama, and Zambia based on ethnographic field observation reveals that the Bolivian municipalities functioned better despite similar challenges. Political party development was likely important in improving the performance of the Bolivian municipal governments, and comparative politics institutional theory can help organize the original data generated by this study. Comparison across two continents increases external validity of this study over traditional area studies.

Keywords: decentralization, developing countries, Bolivia, Panama, Zambia, political development

INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

“It is not by chance that I examine the township first. The township is the sole association that is so much in nature that everywhere men are gathered, a township forms by itself,” wrote de Tocqueville (p. 57). Municipal government has been the focus of study by theorists of global democracy. The incidence of democracy is higher in countries with small populations, so bigger countries might decentralize their government functions to better promote the consolidation and maintenance of democracy at a national level. The barriers to entry for local government are lower than for national government, and therefore more citizens have an opportunity to internalize democratic norms. Local government is more trusted and more accountable than national government. Local government is more representative of the diversity of the national population. Local government acts as a structural bulwark against national government (Diamond, pp. 117-60). Local government can provide more effective public policy outputs than other levels of government. For instance, in the 1980s, President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado changed the Mexican constitution to allow municipal governments authority to tax and made them the primary level of government responsible for various services, and by 1990 newly competitive opposition parties such as PAN began to break the hegemonic PRI grip on municipal government. Once in power, these opposition parties engaged in innovative police reform in a country where 40% of police are controlled at the municipal level (Sabet, pp. 11, 68).

But there are also pitfalls of local government. Local governments can display a short-term perspective. Local governments can also be authoritarian enclaves, as was the Swiss canton that did not allow women

to vote until 1973. Decentralization can exacerbate geographic inequality, and there can be redundancy between national and local government (Diamond, pp. 117-60; Huntington 1991, p. 7).

Under what conditions do the positive characteristics of municipal government outweigh the negative? How do reformers improve local government?

Leadership matters. In 1994 Bolivian president Gonzalo “Goni” Sanchez de Lozada created 314 municipal governments where none effectively existed before (Grindle), and the creation of these municipal governments contributed to the rise of Evo Morales, Bolivia’s first indigenous president (Van Cott), though Madrid (2012) has found that Morales’ inclusive national leadership style in his MAS party mattered more than decentralization.

Ethnographic accounts of municipal government are rare as political scientists have ceded this ground to anthropologists. Edward Banfield, in his classic study of municipal government in Italy, included thoughtful descriptions of people in Potenza, his study site, and pictures to complement his tabular data on elections and budgets, but the genre of ethnographic political science has remained thin, the work of the inimitable James C. Scott notwithstanding (1998). Nietzsche wrote that the state was the ‘coldest of all cold monsters,’ and perhaps it is for this reason that ethnographers have sought to describe more personal phenomena. But local government might strike a balance between the need to recognize meaningful identities that are close to a population, on the one hand, with the competing imperative to manage universally desirable technology such as roads, modern schools, electricity, and trash collection, on the other.

The current article is a research note that compares Chepigana municipal government in Darien Province of Panama with the municipal governments of Toro Toro and Ocurí in the Bolivian highlands surrounding Cochabamba and the Mwinilunga municipal government of Zambia. Far from the overbearing beast imagined by Nietzsche and Scott, the state in these three remote municipalities was often far removed from the populations, which state institutions could neither hurt nor help. The three sites were often a closer approximation to Joel Migdal’s *Strong Societies and Weak States* than to a Leviathan. The Bolivia site was infused with the rich cultural fabric of *ayllus*, documented by anthropologists (Mendoza), and until the 1994 decentralizing Law of Participation Popular (LPP) passed, “No existiamos para el estado” (“We did not exist for the state”), according to one *campesino* (subsistence farmer) (Figure 1). The Panamanians in La Palma, Chepigana, in the sprawling bays and sierras of the Darien Province, while more socially atomized than those of the heavily indigenous sites in Bolivia, were similarly far from the center of government in Panama City. The Transpacific Highway petered out just as it entered the Chepigana province, and locals in the municipal seat of La Palma had to take a water ferry to connect with the highway to take them into the distant capital city (Figure 2). In Mwinilunga, field site of anthropologist Victor Turner in the 1950s, tribal authorities existed alongside the Patriotic Front (PF)-appointed administrator, and Mwinilunga was a jarring 19-hour bus ride from the capital, Lusaka (Figure 3).

FIGURE 1
THE MAYOR (TALL MAN, CENTER) OF TORO TORO, NEWLY ENDOWED WITH LAW OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION FUNDS, INAUGURATES A DRINKING WATER SYSTEM



All photos are author's.

FIGURE 2
A MUNICIPAL INSPECTOR FOR CHEPIGANA MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT READIES HIMSELF TO TRAVEL FROM LA PALMA TO GARACHINÉ IN A BOAT (PANGA) BORROWED FROM THE CONTROLARÍA GENERAL (COMPTROLLER)



FIGURE 3
PATRIOTIC FRONT (PF) MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATOR, A MAYOR EQUIVALENT, IN
MWINILUNGA, ZAMBIA



This research note will describe the conditions in the three municipal governments as they existed from 1997 to 2008. It is based on extended fieldwork and living experience in rural Bolivia from 1997 to 2000, and research trips in 2003, 2008, and 2009 to the Bolivian field sites. Fieldwork in Panama was conducted in December of 2004 and included 69 unstructured interviews selected through a snowballing methodology, and Zambia research included 22 interviews in country in August of 2018.

Clifford Geertz wrote about “doing ethnography” that was at once leavened by theory (1973, pp. 5-6; 24-28). This research note perhaps arrogantly or naively contributes to an attempt to inspire the process of reimagining how we study government structures. What follows is a description of each field site and a brief comparative analysis.

TORO TORO AND OCURÍ, BOLIVIA

Toro Toro and Ocurí are rural municipalities in one of the most isolated regions of the Bolivian Andean valleys. Politically each belongs to the Potosí Department, the poorest and most indigenous of Bolivia’s nine departments (a state equivalent in the US). While each belongs to the Potosí department, the orientation of roads emanating from the municipal centers connects them to different urban centers. Toro Toro was connected to Cochabamba, Bolivia’s third largest city, by a 10-12 hour bus ride during the time of this research, and one in which the road was impassible for weeks at a time during rainy season. Ocurí was connected to the smaller cities of Sucre and Oruro by a better road. Cochabamba and Sucre were in Cochabamba Department and Chuquisaca Department, respectively, and therefore both Toro Toro and Ocurí’s connection with the Potosi Department government was limited. It would take about 20 hours, at the time of this research, on bus to arrive to Potosí city, the capital of the eponymous department, from Toro Toro.

Toro Toro is near the tribal lands of the *ayllus* of the Macha, Pukwata, Laymi, Chayanta, and Sakaka. The function of these tribal groups, which number from 8,000 to 15,000, have traditionally been based on

barter trade and the principle of ancestor worship (Godoy; Platt), but their institutions are changing (Norris 2011).

The municipal governments of Toro Toro and Ocurí are housed in a physical compound called an *alcaldía*, and each is in a prominent location in the town center (Figure 4). It is impossible to walk through the streets of either town and not come across the imposing edifices of the *alcaldías*. This is different from many US towns, in which a visitor would have to search for the seat of government.

FIGURE 4
ALCALDÍA (RED CIRCLE), OR TOWN HALL, IN OCURÍ



Major services that municipal governments provided during the time of this fieldwork included drinking water service, in-ground sewer, electricity, hospital, k-12 education, road construction and maintenance, trash collection, tax collection, and more. Table 1 summarizes the services that were provided during the time of fieldwork irrespective of legal mandates in the four field sites.

TABLE 1
MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Service	Toro Toro	Ocurí	Chepigana	Mwinilunga
Electricity	n/y	y	y	y
In-ground sewer	n	y	y	y
k-8 education	y*	y*	?	?
9-12 grade education	n/y*	y*	?	?
Permanent police force	n	n	n	y*
Hospital (h)/medical post (mp)	mp*	h*	?	h*
Trash collection (urban center)	n	n	y	?
Potable water (urban center)	y	y	y	y
Potable water (rural areas)	n/y	n/y	?	n
Tax collection	n	n	y	?
School bus service	n	n/y	?	?
Boarding for k-12 students	y*	n	?	?

Road construction	n/y	n	?	?
Regulation of festivals	y	y	y	?
Notary public services	?	?	y	?
Slaughterhouse	n	n	y	n
Other				
Indigenous populations	y	y	y	y
Indigenous/municipal interaction	y	y	n	y
Indigenous executive represented for municipality	n	n	n	y
National bureaucracies present in local affairs	n	n	n	y
Catholic Church influential in public administration	y	n	n	?
Mass party “patronage” present	n/y	n/y	n	n
y=present during fieldwork; n=not present; n/y=developed during fieldwork period; *=provided in municipality by entity other than municipal government				

There are multiple service providers in each municipality. In Toro Toro, the Catholic Church effectively runs the school (Figure 5) and the health post. In Ocurí, a non-profit called IPTK (Instituto Politécnico Tomas Katari) runs the school and a sizable regional hospital. Ocurí has long had electricity in the municipal core because of nearby mines owned by former president Goni (Figure 6).

FIGURE 5
A CATHOLIC CHURCH-RUN CLASSROOM IN THE K-8TH GRADE SCHOOL IN TORO TORO, CA. 1998



FIGURE 6
PROXIMITY TO MINES HELPED OCURÍ PRECOCIOUSLY DEVELOP ELECTRICITY



Both Toro Toro and Ocurí municipalities displayed a major increase in Municipal capacity during the time of fieldwork. Almost all of this increase in capacity can be attributed to national-to-local transfers from two sources. First, in the 1990s LLP re-allocated national resources on a per-capita, transparent formula. For instance, in about 1999 the national per capita allocation for LPP was \$120 and Toro Toro had census population of 10,000 giving it an annual budget of \$1.2 million. The second source was from the politicized IDH (*impuesto directo hidrocarburos*, direct tax on hydrocarbons) during the Evo Morales government beginning in 2005. The IDH transfers were based on windfall profits from the national gas industry and were both greater than the funds transferred by LPP and distributed in a more clientelistic fashion (Gray Molina, pp. 66-68). Whether from LPP funds or from IDH funds, many services and infrastructure increased between the mid-1990s and 2008, when the fieldwork for this research ended. The school system in Toro Toro added capacity to provide education through high school, and the municipal government-built schools and water systems (Figures 7-11). Ocurí instituted a bus service for school children.

FIGURE 7
RURAL SCHOOL NEAR TORO TORO 1997



FIGURE 8
THE SAME RURAL SCHOOL SITE IN 2008 AFTER LPP AND IDH NATIONAL-TO-LOCAL TRANSFERS AUGMENTED LOCAL CAPACITY FOR SERVICES



FIGURE 9
RURAL INHABITANTS IN TORO TORO LOAD A MUNICIPAL DUMP TRUCK WITH CEMENT, REBAR, AND TUBING FOR DRINKING WATER SYSTEM CONSTRUCTION



FIGURE 10
RURAL INHABITANTS OUTSIDE OCURÍ USE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT-PROVIDED
MATERIALS TO CONSTRUCT A DRINKING WATER SYSTEM



FIGURE 11
ONE DRINKING WATER SYSTEM WAS STILL FUNCTIONING IN 2008, EIGHT YEARS
AFTER CONSTRUCTION



In-kind contributions are what comparativists consider a form of state extraction paid in terms of “persons” and “services” in lieu of money, the latter being representative of taxes (Almond, et al, pp. 165-69). Democratic theory holds that adequate resources must be available for local government to be viable, but it is important that not all of the resources come from national-to-local transfers (Diamond, pp. 140-42). In-kind contributions balanced national government transfers in the form of LPP and IDH in Toro Toro and Ocurí.

CHEPIGANA, PANAMA¹

The Chepigana District is one of two municipal districts that compose the Darien Province of Panama along with the Pinogana District. Two semi-autonomous *comarcas*, or indigenous reserves, the Embera-Wounaan, also fall within the provincial borders of the Darien. The Chepigana municipal government comprises sixteen sub-municipal political units, or *corregimientos*, each with its own representative.

Sparse population and extensive land area characterize the Chepigana municipal district. While the population of Chepigana equals only 1% of the national total, its land area equals approximately 9.3% of the national total in square kilometers.

Dense forests, rolling mountains and substantial bodies of water characterize Chepigana's geography, making much of the municipality inaccessible or at least hard to get to. This has implications for travel and communication between *corregimientos*. Transportation among many of Chepigana's population centers is accomplished by small launch (*panga*) (Figure 2) or small plane. Most roads that connect much of Chepigana's population are unpaved roads that are subject to flooding during rainy times (Figure 12).

FIGURE 12
CORREGIDOR OF CHEPIGANA TRAVELS FROM GARACHINÉ TO SAMBÚ IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION. THE MOBILE GOVERNMENT SERVICE EVOKES THE DAYS OF 'RIDING CIRCUIT' AS JUDGES DID IN THE WESTWARD EXPANDING UNITED STATES



Travel times within the district vary substantially depending on weather conditions, whether one travels in private transportation or public transportation, and by destination. A field trip that I took with Benicio Ibarquen M. (all names are pseudonyms), Chepigana's mayor, from La Palma to Rio Congo Arriba is illustrative. We departed from La Palma at 9:30 AM in public boat, one hour later than expected because the transportation cooperative attendant had sold our reserved seats. One half hour later we arrived in Puerto Quimba on the Panamanian side of the Tuira River and climbed into public transportation—a small truck such as the one seen in Figure 12—that would carry us forty minutes away to the Metetí and the Panamerican highway. At Metetí we waited approximately one hour to catch a bus to take us in one hour and a half to Santa Fe. From Santa Fe we traveled in a pick-up with driver both borrowed from COPEG, a USDA-sponsored veterinary program in the Darien. We arrived at Rio Congo Arriba at almost 3:00 PM for a meeting with that *corregimiento*'s representative.

There are several substantially completed, yet unfinished, projects in the district. Various actors, from previous municipal government administrations to *corregimiento* representatives to central government ministries, began these projects and then left them to decay before their completion. In some instance—such as the case of the gymnasium in La Palma—vandalism and lack of maintenance are threatening to damage otherwise sound construction (Figure 13).

FIGURE 13
A PAST MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION BUILT BUT DID NOT FINISH
THIS GYMNASIUM/MULTIPURPOSE COMPLEX NEAR LA PALMA IN 2001



Chepigana elected a new mayor and substantially new town council in May of 2004, and ten out of sixteen council representatives were new to their offices. The Chepigana municipal government employs approximately thirty-five employees. Twenty of these positions are in its central office in La Palma, the majority of which work in the mayor’s office. Table 2 summarizes the municipal government’s employees.

TABLE 2
CHEPIGANA MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES

Municipal Employees, Chepigana, Panama	
Alcaldía (Mayor’s office)	
Alcalde (mayor)	1
Secretaria (secretary)	1
Trabajador manual (manual laborer)	1
Trabajador manual – Mercador (manual laborer for market)	1
Inspectores Municipales (Municipal inspectors)	2
Oficinista (office helper)	1
Aseo (cleaning person)	4
Total	11
Consejo Municipal (Municipal Council)	
Secretaria (Secretary)	1
Asistente (Assistant)	1
	2

Tesoreria (Treasurer)	
Tesorero	1
Apoyo (Support staff)	4
	5
Corregiduria (akin to justice of the peace, or notary public)	
Corregidor	1
Secretaria (Secretary)	1
	2

Additionally, the Chepigana municipal government includes at least fifteen *corregidores* (or *regidores*, an official with similar but less extensive powers compared to that of a *corregidor* in smaller *corregimientos*) on its payroll in the *corregimientos* outside of La Palma. *Corregidores* receive fees from various notary services (see Table 3) and further provide the political functions of interest articulation and interest aggregation (Almond, pp. 78-126).

TABLE 3

Services, Corregiduria de Santa Fe, Panama	
Servicios (Services)	Price (Bilbaos)
Certificaciones (Certificates)	3.00
Contratos de Arrenda (Rental contracts)	5.00
Permiso de mudanza (Moving permission)	3.00
Compra venta (Buy / sell)	10.00
Arreglos de pago (Payment plan)	2.00
Firma y sello (Signature and seal)	2.00
Permiso de actividades (Activities permission)	
Bailables (Tipico) (Private party)	25.00
Bailables (Discoteca) (commercial/discotech)	15.00

The mayor directs the activities of the municipal employees in an ad hoc fashion. On any given day, certain municipal workers might dedicate time to tasks not directly related to their formal area of responsibility. For example, both the municipal *corregidor* and one of the municipal inspectors dedicated several days to overseeing the repair of a clogged sewage connection in the *alcaldia* during my visit. Chepigana municipal government employees based in the town hall generally dedicate their time to activities that service the urban area of La Palma. For instance, sanitation workers divide their time between collecting trash in La Palma and clearing brushy or green areas in outlying areas and municipal parks. Municipal inspectors concentrate their efforts in La Palma as well.

The Treasurer's Office dedicates most of its time to collecting and accounting for municipality-wide tax receipts. Approximately 5% of its time is dedicated to accounting for Community Civil Works program funds allocated in the *corregimientos*. A more limited portion of Chepigana municipal government personnel dedicate their time to activities that affect at least some of the sixteen *corregimientos* of the district. The municipal council's secretary and assistant dedicated almost 100% of their time to the administration of the Community Civil Works funds allocated to each representative. The municipal *corregidor* supports *corregidores* and *regidores* in the fifteen *corregimientos* outside of La Palma to the extent that transportation and his technical capacity permit. High turnover of politically appointed *corregidores* and *regidores* in *corregidurias* limits technical efficacy of the units.

Overall, the managerial and technical capacities of the Chepigana municipal government are quite limited. In this respect, the Chepigana municipal government faces challenges similar to those faced by other local government entities worldwide: "In many countries decentralization efforts are seriously

hampered by low managerial capacities at the respective levels of government” (Campbell, Peterson, and Brakarz 1991; Campbell 2003).

The case of trash collection in La Palma is illustrative. The Chepigana municipal government has programmed trash pick-up for three days per week. Lacking a municipal dump truck, the Chepigana municipal government has arranged to borrow a dump truck and driver from the local office of the Ministry of Public Works (MOP). The Chepigana municipal government provides diesel fuel and workers for the trash pickup and has rented a piece of land outside of La Palma to be used as a landfill. In reality, trash pickup seldom occurs three times per week. MOP activities take precedence over the Chepigana municipal government’s commitment to its citizens to assure timely and effective trash collection. The MOP dump truck was non-functional for at least two of the days that I was in La Palma. Municipal sanitation workers interviewed estimated that trash collection occurs on average from one to 1.5 times per week. If trash crews miss even one programmed collection day, trash quickly accumulates in the streets. Rains often wash uncollected trash into the River Tuira, which runs parallel to Main Street, La Palma (see Figures 14 and 15).

FIGURE 14
TRASH PICK-UP IN LA PALMA WITH MUNICIPAL SANITATION CREW AND
BORROWED DUMP TRUCK FROM THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS (MOP)



FIGURE 15
TRASH NEAR THE RIVER IN LA PALMA, CHEPIGANA



The inability to provide basic services such as trash collection on a regular basis extends to other services, such as periodic cleaning of the municipal market where meats and fish are sold on a daily basis in La Palma. Finding it difficult to accomplish such basic tasks in the urban center where its offices are located, the Chepigana municipal government finds itself overwhelmed with larger responsibilities such as urban planning and code enforcement (Figure 16). Providing such services on a district-wide scale is well beyond the Chepigana municipal government's current capacity. With the exceptions of the *corregidor/regidor* service and limited support in trash collection, the Chepigana municipal government leaves the fifteen *corregimientos* outside of La Palma to their own means to find solutions to urban planning, trash collection, basic service provision, public park maintenance, etc.

FIGURE 16
ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF LA PALMA



Juntas comunales (community boards) and *juntas locales* (local boards), where they exist, address these needs to the best of their ability. Most communities and community groups bypass the Chepigana municipal government in their attempts to procure basic services. These groups, either through their representative or independently, negotiate directly with an array of service providers to provide trash pick-up, pave roads, provide sanitation services, maintain public areas, enforce zoning regulations, etc. Potential service providers include central government ministries, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), civil society groups, private businesses, and multilateral organizations. Representatives often negotiate with high level public officials (e.g., the provincial governor, a presidential appointee) to sway the decisions of central government functionaries that control resources. Campbell and Fuhr refer to this type of direct bargaining with higher level agencies and organizations as “vertical coordination” (28).

Under traditional, largely rent-seeking arrangements, it [is] still rational for local authorities [e.g., *corregimiento* representatives] not to seek coordination with other local actors [e.g., MGC]. Instead, local authorities found it more beneficial to enter excessive bargaining and seek the favor of central authorities. (ibid.)

A related form of vertical coordination takes place between representatives and international NGOs or private companies without including the municipal government as an intermediary. One community, Agua Fria, has on occasion taken up a collection from community members to rent heavy earth moving equipment from a local priest for \$60 per hour to repair local roads. In the same community people pay between \$8 and \$20 per month for water service provided by a private company.

Through the first eleven months of 2003 the Chepigana municipal government collected \$237,000 in tax revenues, or approximately \$21,500 per month. These revenues came from a variety of sources, including construction permits, fines, commercial fees and taxes, etc. The Chepigana municipal government carries approximately \$40,000 of debt from previous administrations. Time did not permit a detailed review of municipal finances in the current study. However, consensus exists among various actors (municipal functionaries, central government ministry functionaries, international development organization heads and citizens at large) that many potential sources of income escape the Chepigana municipal government. The common refrain in interviews while addressing this topic was, ‘Hay mucha fuga de impuestos’ (tr.: ‘There is a great escaping of taxes [from this region]’) (See Figure 17).

FIGURE 17
UNREGULATED LOGGING IN CHEPIGANA



Darien is a natural resource rich province that provides substantial amounts of timber and fresh fish—especially white shrimp—for Panama City and for international export. Recent data for these commodities were not available for this report; however, figures from the late 90’s help foster an appreciation of the potential revenue generation in these areas. In 1996, the Darien Province as a whole produced approximately 12.5 million cubic feet of timber (INRENARE). The Darien Produced just shy of 15,000 tons of fish (all types) in 1996 (*Contraloría General de la República*). Additionally, the Chepigana district is home to at least one large stone quarry in the Santa Fe corregimiento. The Chepigana municipal government reaps virtually no benefit from these industries. Commercial operators pay taxes in Panama City, if they pay taxes at all, according to some interviewees.

Chepigana municipal government’s ability to increase tax revenue is limited by its poor performance in the area of service delivery as described above. Citizens in the Chepigana district are weary to pay taxes because they perceive a low level of municipal service. Poor performance on this most basic and visible municipal service breeds resentment among the population. One older woman exclaimed with vitriol, “¡Es una porquería!” (“This is filth!”), when I asked her about the trash that surrounded the sidewalk around her shop on Main Street in La Palma. This resentment can spill over into taxpayers’ decisions on whether to pay unrelated municipal fees, such as building permit fees.

Health officials are reluctant to sanction individuals in violation of health codes that prohibit depositing refuse and other materials that could become mosquito breeding grounds. Health officials correctly point out that the municipal government is the biggest offender of all, citing its inability to provide adequate trash collection services. Health workers cannot justify fining relatively minor violators in the face of such blatant violations on the part of the Chepigana municipal government. Individual violators therefore go without fines. This reluctance to fine on the part of health to sanction violators robs the *corregiduría*, which would collect the fines and channel the proceeds into municipal coffers, of the opportunity to expand its revenue generation role.

Most people in the *corregimientos* distinguish between the municipality (*municipio*), or the mayor’s office (*alcaldía*), which levies taxes, and their representative (*honorable representante*), which provides services or projects with Community Civil Service funds (Obras Comunitarias). Taxpayers do not associate the services/projects that their representatives deliver with the taxes that they pay to the Chepigana municipal government. The Chepigana municipal government gets virtually no credit in the minds of taxpayers for Community Civil Service projects. Central government ministries and international

development agencies, by contrast, advertise the services that they provide without crediting the Chepigana municipal government. Such advertisement takes the form of project signage with sponsors' logos most often. Such advertisements reinforce in the minds of taxpayers that it is any organization but the municipal government that is providing public services (see Figure 18).

FIGURE 18
“PURCHASE OF 8 COMPUTERS AND AIR CONDITIONING FOR THE SAMBU DISTRICT,”
READS THE SIGN. THE SOCIAL INVESTMENT FUND IS BASED IN PANAMA CITY



MWINILUNGA, ZAMBIA

According to the District Administrative Officer (district administrator), Kanalamba Abdel, all government service heads report to him, including the police, local prison facilities, health officials, and certain government-led economic initiatives. According to him, there are two systems of government, a “local government” and a “central government.” He represents the latter because though he resides locally and administers local matters, he was appointed by the central government, that is the governing PF (Patriotic Front) party. The “local government” is presumably the tribal government, well documented elsewhere (see Molteno, pp. 62-106). There are sixteen employees of his office, including

1. District commissioner
2. District administrator
3. Officer chiefs & traditional officials
4. Stenographer
5. Accountant
6. Typist
7. Registry clerk
8. Head messenger
9. District messenger (acting as registry clerk)
10. Driver (two)
11. Office orderly

12. Station handyman
13. Security guard (two)

The administrator describes an environment in which local government is “still developing,” but central government has been devolving authority to local governments increasingly. He has been in his current post only two months and was a school teacher earlier in his career.

According to the administrator, in criminal justice issues formally the “security wings are under the president [of the republic].” The police “maintain order” and “do arrests when the law is broken.” If offenders are incarcerated, the institutions provide them instruction in carpentry, gardening, or farming, so that perhaps they “do not go back to offending.” The local prison has three functions, which include custodial (i.e., detaining offenders), production (e.g., maize, goats, sheep, and poultry), and reformation of the prisoner through learning trades such as carpentry, bricklaying, and crafts. These goals for criminal justice are consonant with global criminal justice norms (Norris 2018), suggesting such norms might be more universalistic than relativistic analyses often portray. On a walking tour, we see the police station, a court, a prison, and a “Glea in Pleasure Club” for police and prison officials. The utility of the latter becomes apparent in touring the local drunk tank in the red-light district of Mwinilunga. The officers likely come from local communities, and the siren’s call of the bars on the opposite end of town from the police compound could cause trouble for the officers and the institution. It is better to give them a dedicated place to socialize under supervision. In the local prison, there is a staff of 17, including 15 “warders,” or general-purpose guards, one officer in charge, and one deputy for 102 prisoners. This level of staffing—about 1:6—is well above the United Nations recommended 1:10 staff-to-inmate ratio (more staff per inmate is desirable), and is in line with staffing of state prisons in Mexico City, Mexico; Guanajuato, Mexico; Dehli, India; Haryana, India; and Telangana, India (Norris 2018, Table 1.1). When I visited the police station and requested an interview, its commanding officer called to Lusaka to request permission, which was denied.

The hospital has only two doctors for between 50,000 and 150,000 population in its “catchment area.” The hospital authorities reported the former figure (see Figure 19), while the district administrator reported the latter. Either way, the physician-to-population ratio is much worse than that of Toro Toro, which had one to two doctors for its 10,000 population. The district administrator pointed out that “doctors don’t want to work in rural areas,” a dynamic evidenced in the Bolivia cases of this article and amply documented in the literature, for those who care to look. There are 120 hospital employees who work in three 24-hour shifts with about 40 employees each. Each employee works two weeks on, one week off. There are about 80 beds in the hospital, according to hospital personnel, and there are about 110-120 babies on the maternity ward. There are only two ambulances, and they “need service” before making the trek to the larger town of Solwezi. As with many hospitals in developing countries, patients buy medicines that physicians need to treat them. Diseases include typical infirmities for rural areas in developing countries, including cholera and diarrhea. The rainy season ends in June or July, and this leads to a cold, windy season in which cases of pneumonia go up. In my visit to Mwinilunga, the local hospital had a sign urging clean circumcision in the hospital, suggesting that 50 years after Turner wrote about the *mukanda* circumcision ritual (Turner, pp. 151–279), there were still basic tensions between traditional practices and modern medical imperatives.

FIGURE 19
HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR, MWINILUNGA HOSPITAL



The Zambian government is working on several initiatives in the economic and infrastructure spheres, though it was not always clear from the district administrator's comments which initiatives were aspirational and which level of government took primary responsibility. The "agriculture department" helps farmers in camps, and there is a new department of cooperatives. Farmers receive inputs "through family," not individually. Reflecting the ubiquitous desires of people in rural areas of developing countries, a department of cooperatives is focusing on bringing electricity to rural areas. There was a government census of animals, treatment of animals, and breeding center. The government bought cows for breeding and sold these cows at a reduced rate to rural dwellers for breeding. Rural Zambians paid 700-800 *kwacha* (the national currency) for heifers worth 2,500-3,000 *kwacha*. A fisheries department provided fingerlings to farmers. On the initiative for water and sewer for rural areas, the "government was failing." The department of water affairs hired a private company to come in, but this public policy output was deficient.

Social Forces and Mwinilunga Government

A social force is an ethnic, religious, territorial, economic, or status group (Huntington 2006, p. 8). An institution is a valued, stable, and recurring pattern of behavior, and institutionalization is the process by which institutions acquire value (ibid., p. 12). To the extent that social forces are strong vis-à-vis an institution, we say that the institution lacks institutionalization. The Mwinilunga municipal government faces strong challenges from autonomous social forces, including tribal authorities, the national police force, the hospital, and potentially a third, the Catholic Church.

Tribal influence in rural Zambia is well documented (Molteno; Resnick, pp. 148-80), and this influence was in evidence in my fieldwork. Mwinilunga was the rural field site of anthropologist Victor Turner in the 1950s, in part because its isolation preserved the local traditions he was interested in (1967, p. 2). "That's the book! That's the book!" exclaimed a man when I visited the Mwinilunga Hospital with Turner's book under arm. The man's father was a tribal leader and had acted as an informant for Turner, and the man himself had been the informant of Turner's wife, who returned to Mwinilunga to conduct fieldwork for her own ethnography in the 1980s. The interaction was telling because tribal leaders made their presence felt in Mwinilunga. When I interviewed the local administrator appointed by the PF political party, a tribal elder

hovered around as we chatted. Toro Toro has large and vibrant indigenous populations, but these do not have an executive for direct communication with municipal or other authorities.

When I visited the local outpost for the Zambian National Police, which appeared free from such influences, this institution took its orders from the central government in Lusaka, not the municipal government. The PF administrator felt that he had the authority to grant me access to the prisons, but a stern rebuke from the police administrator left him chastened.

Thus, the municipal government of Mwinilunga showed itself to be hemmed in on the one side by tribal authorities and on the other by a central government police bureaucracy. The Mwinilunga municipal government was not autonomous from the social forces of either tribal authorities or the police force.

The hospital displayed a similar autonomy from municipal government influence, but the hospital's technical specialization made this more natural than police autonomy and especially tribal autonomy, as tribal authorities effectively sought to replicate many municipal functions and vice versa. The hospitals in Ocurí and Toro Toro were similarly autonomous from municipal governance, and medical units in prisons in the US and Mexico tended to be semi-autonomous from prison administration (Norris 2018).

The Catholic Church was a social force influential in Mwinilunga. Father Donald Kamuya Pari was a Franciscan priest from Ndola assigned to Mwinilunga. He studied philosophy for three years and received a bachelor of arts degree before being sent to Nairobi, Kenya to study theology for four years. He first came to Mwinilunga in 2016, and he had preconceived notions about the place as a pineapple-producing region. The church, as does the municipal government, is at least ambivalent about the autonomy of indigenous groups. According to father Pari, the Lunda respect the authority of the chief. To pay respect to their dead, they go to tribal burial sites instead of coming to the church. He complained about local traditions. There were "so much superstitions, evil spirits...Somebody behind someone bewitched." He believes that politicians seek to reinforce ethnic identity. "Vote for me. [You are] from my tribe." In contrast, Kenneth Kaunda emphasized that Zambia was "one nation." Similarly, the Jesus preached unity, peace, and love. This is an example of the complexity of public policy outputs, which depend upon, but are not identical with, a sense of shared community in comparative politics political theory (Almond, pp. 21-28; Fukuyama, p. 173). "Catholics" did contribute to public policy outputs by developing hydroelectric power. Mwinilunga is "becoming cosmopolitan," according to the priest. People from other parts of the country are coming.

CONCLUSION: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CASES

Area studies experts feel that comparativists make missteps when writing about 'their' regions, the so-called "transitologist" debate (Schmitter, et al; Bunce). Yet comparison based on fieldwork in three countries and two continents, such as that in this research note, increases the external validity of findings. The data are fragmentary, but this may reflect Aristotle's prescription to study objects at the level of precision their nature allows.

Analysts of municipal government in Latin America and other developing regions have documented the low capacity of municipal governments to perform basic functions. Campbell and Fuhr observe, "Many formal instruments of local democracy, like those that channel communication between residents and elected officials, have fallen into disuse or were never fully developed at the subnational level in Latin America" (43). Yet improvement is possible. Campbell and Fuhr argue that "Perhaps the most important factors for increasing municipal and subnational institutional performance are a sustained change in the employment and salary regimes of local civil servants and the revamping of the organization and functioning of municipal administrations" (29).

Yet these observations do not arise to the level of a theory of municipal development. How does one reform local government and increase its capacity?

Evidence from Bolivia, Panama, and Zambia suggests that improvement of municipal service capacity is possible. The principal dysfunction of the unreformed municipal governments was what analysts of comparative politics might classify as one of a proliferation of social forces that dominate and overwhelm government institutions. Social forces in the three cases included the local indigenous communities, local

representatives of national bureaucracies, territorial units such as the *corregimientos* in Chepigana, local commercial interests, the Catholic Church, and more. The unreformed Panamanian municipal government was powerless to control or marginalize these social forces. Similarly, the Mwinilunga municipal government competed directly with highly institutionalized local tribal groups and an atypically present national bureaucracy. Bolivian municipalities in the late 1990s were similarly weak but became increasingly stronger as the effects of LPP and IDH national-to-local resource transfers manifested themselves. Bolivian municipalities were able to assert control with massive influxes of resources from LPP and from IDH over various national presidential administrations.

The institutional literature in comparative politics has been of two minds on institutional development of the type seen in Bolivia. One perspective holds that patronage politics, such as those employed by MAS (Movement Toward Socialism), the party of Evo Morales, undermines institutionalization because, by definition, patronage politics coopt public resources for the narrower interests of the political party (Gray Molina, *ibid.*; Corrales, p. 7). This is akin to corruption, the definition of which is use of public resources for private gain. As indicated in Table 1, only the Bolivia cases were unique in the presence of mass political parties, specifically the MAS party of Evo Morales. In the final field visit to these sites in 2008, political parties had claimed credit for some infrastructure projects built in the late 1990s by painting their logos on the infrastructure, though these parties had not participated in the creation of the works.

It would be wrong, however, to interpret this arrogation of credit by political parties as an unalloyed ill. A second branch of institutionalist comparativist literature sees the creation of political parties as an essential element of political development in complex society. Political parties emerge out of and replace corruption. In doing so, patronage-based political parties begin to link otherwise alienated social forces to the state and begin a directional movement toward more highly desirable programmatic parties that might displace the patronage-based parties. Samuel Huntington wrote, “The parties which at first are the leeches on the bureaucracy in the end become the bark protecting it from more destructive locusts of clique and family” (Huntington, 2006, pp. 59-71, quote from p. 71).

Among the cases of this study, MAS in the Bolivia municipalities began by distributing patronage from LPP and later the enhanced and less formulaic IDH funds, and in doing so was able to compel coordination among otherwise fissiparous social forces. By contrast, the anemic Chepigana municipality could not distinguish itself among many other institutional actors. Political parties, defined as an organization that fields candidates and wins votes, are not identical with state institutions, but their natural home is the state institution that winning an election entitles them to influence and manage. Thus, in this set of circumstances, the interest of the party is closer to the interest of the state, here represented by the municipal government, than are the interests of other social forces. The Bolivian municipalities were further along in their political development not only because of the infusion of resources from LPP and IDH, which might or might not be more than national and international resources channeled through government ministries and international institutions in at least the Panama case, but because of the political development represented by the creation of the MAS party in Bolivia.

The nature of the social forces present affected the function of the municipalities. David Horowitz distinguishes among different types of ethnic groups in Africa (1985). Here, the executive capacity of the Zambian ethnic groups contrasted with the numerically large but otherwise acephalous indigenous groups of the Bolivia cases. The executive capacity of the ethnic groups in Mwinilunga hemmed in the autonomy of its municipal government, while this was not the case in Bolivia. Political leaders know the nature of the social forces in their societies, sometimes better than analysts, and it is therefore likely that Evo Morales’s promotion of indigenous identity (see Van Cott; Paige) was done in part because he knew that he could do so without harm to his real goal: state building. In contrast, the Zambian officials are not near so confident, and many of my 22 interviewees emphasized the “72 tribes” of Zambia and Kenneth Kaunda’s emphasis on Zambia as “One nation.” There was almost a sense of insecurity about the comments of state-builders in Zambia. In Panama, indigenous groups were alienated from municipal government, and non-indigenous communities complained about dedicated resources that the Embera-Wounaan received from the central government and outside sources, though both they—the non-indigenous—and the Embera-Wounaan were

equally poor and marginalized. In fact, when the Embera-Wounaan did seek the help of the municipality, they were rebuffed because the indigenous, the municipality claimed, “already got help from the state.”

The role of the Catholic church is complex, but it was present in Bolivia, especially in Toro Toro, and Zambia, but not in Panama and less in Ocuri.

Political parties can help connect social forces to the state and adjudicate among competing interests, a function that comparativists call ‘interest aggregation’ (Almond, pp. 102-26), and one that is central to the proper function of municipal government, if the cases of this study are representative.

ENDNOTE

- ¹ Portions of this section were published in Brian Norris, “Chepigana Municipal Strengthening,” USAID and ACIDI/VOCA, 2004.

REFERENCES

- Almond, G., Powell, G.B., Strom, K., & Dalton R.J. (2004). *Comparative Politics: A Theoretical Framework*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Banfield, E.C. (1958). *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. New York: The Free Press.
- Bunce, V. (1995). Should Transitologists Be Grounded? *Slavic Review*, 54, 111–127.
- Campbell, T. (2003). *The Quiet Revolution: Decentralization and the Rise of Political Participation in Latin American Cities*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press.
- Campbell, T., & Fuhr, H. (2004). *Leadership and Innovation in Subnational Government: Case Studies from Latin America*. Washington, DC: WBI Development Studies.
- Campbell, T., Peterson, G., & Brakarz, J. (1991). *Decentralization to Local Government in LAC: National Strategies and Local Response in Planning, Spending, and Management*. Report No. 5, Latin America and the Caribbean Technical Department, Regional Studies Program.
- Corrales, J., & Penfold, M. (2015). *Dragon in the Tropics: The Legacy of Hugo Chavez* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press.
- de Tocqueville, A. (2000). *Democracy in America*, translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (2018). *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In Geertz (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Godoy, R. (1990). *Mining and Agriculture in Highland Bolivia: Ecology, History, and Commerce among the Jukumani*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Gray Molina, G. (2010). The Challenge of Progressive Change Under Evo Morales. In K. Weyland, R. Madrid, & W. Hunter (Eds.), *Leftist Governments in Latin America*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Grindle, M. (2000). *Audacious Reforms: Institutional Invention and Democracy in Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Horowitz, D.L. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Huntington, S.P. (2006 [1968]). *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Huntington, S.P. (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- INRENARE. (n.d.). Instituto Nacional de Recursos Renovables, Panama City
- Madrid, R.L. (2012). *The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Mendoza, F., Flores, W., & Letourneux, C. (1994). *Atlas de los ayllus de Chayanta, Vol. 1, Territorios del suni*. Potosí: Programa de Autodesarrollo Campesino.
- Migdal, J. (1988). *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Molteno, R. (1974). Cleavage and Conflict in Zambian Politics: A Study in Sectionalism. In W. Tordoff, *Politics in Zambia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Norris, B. (2011). Ideology and Social Improvement in Bolivia in the 20th Century. *Bolivian Studies Journal*, 18, 198–228.
- Norris, B. (2018). *Prison Bureaucracies in the United States, Mexico, India, and Honduras*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018.
- Paige, J.M. (2020). *Indigenous Revolution in Ecuador and Bolivia, 1990-2005*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Platt, T. (1976). *Espejos y maíz: Temas de la estructura simbólica andina*. La Paz, Bolivia: CIPCA.
- Resnick, D. (2014). *Urban Poverty and Party Populism in African Democracies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Sabet, D.M. (2012). *Police Reform in Mexico: Informal Politics and the Challenge of Institutional Change*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Schmitter, P.C., & Karl, T.L. (1994). The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go? *Slavic Review*, 53, 172–185.
- Scott, J.C. (1998). *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Turner, V. (1967). *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Van Cott, D.L. (2005). *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Parties*. New York: Cambridge University Press.