

# A Different Latin America

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Bolivia's recent presidential election was almost as history making as Iraq's parliamentary vote. The winner, Evo Morales, will be the first member of the indigenous majority to run Bolivia since the conquistadors arrived nearly five centuries ago. His victory was one of the most decisive since the return of democracy more than two decades ago, ending an era of weak, unstable and ineffective governments.

But do not expect any toasts from the Bush administration. During the campaign, Mr. Morales advertised himself as Washington's "nightmare." He opposes almost everything the Bush team stands for in Latin America, from combating coca leaf production to privatizing natural resources and liberalizing trade. His favorite Latin leaders are Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Fidel Castro of Cuba. And the political popularity of these anti-Washington positions is part of a growing regional trend.

The political balance in Latin America has clearly been shifting to the left. Nearly 300 million of South America's 365 million people live under left-wing governments. While many of these governments, like Brazil's and Chile's, have worked hard to cooperate with the United States, others, like Venezuela's, have gone out of their way to bait Washington. Mr. Morales gives every indication of following the Chávez approach. And there could be similar lurches to the demagogic left in the numerous Latin American elections that are soon coming up in places like Peru, Mexico and Nicaragua.

One explanation is that nearly two decades of Washington-recommended economic and trade policies have not done much for millions of urban and rural poor. Another is that the Bush administration has not shown much interest in addressing Latin American social problems. And Mr. Bush has done a terrible job of cultivating personal relationships with Latin American leaders.

Few countries adopted Washington's economic prescriptions more eagerly than Bolivia did in the 1980's and 90's. Yet despite considerable mineral and energy resources, it remains South America's poorest country, with 60 percent of its people living in poverty. The left-behind and angry poor voted for Mr. Morales in large numbers, as they have voted repeatedly for Mr. Chávez in Venezuela.

When denunciations of Yankee imperialism in Latin America start coming from the presidential palaces as well as from the streets and opposition benches, Washington needs to change its ways. The friendship of neighbors is a terrible thing to lose.