



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Located in the heart of South America, Bolivia is a landlocked country of 424,164 square miles (1,098,581 square kilometers); it is almost three times the size of Montana. There are five distinct geographical areas: the high, cold, and dry mountain-rimmed Altiplano to the west; Las Yungas, a region of medium-elevation valleys northeast of La Paz and Cochabamba; the agricultural highland valleys in the center of the country; the Gran Chaco, a vast subtropical plain shared with Paraguay and Argentina; and the *llanos* or *el trópico*—wet, hot, forested lowlands in the east and northeast. Grasslands are common on these lands, which makes the area good for cattle ranching. Forests cover about half of Bolivia.

The Andes Mountains, which run north-south through the country, climb to more than 21,000 feet (6,401 meters). They are permanently covered with snow above 16,000 feet (4,800 meters). The famous Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable body of water in the world (12,500 feet, or 3,810 meters), lies on the north end of the Altiplano. The country has two main seasons. Summer (November–April) is the rainy season. Winter is from June to September. In La Paz, the average annual temperature is 65°F (18°C). Unlike most countries, Bolivia has two capital cities: La Paz is the seat of government, where the president and legislature are located; Sucre is home to the country's highest courts.

History

The Tiahuanaco civilization inhabited the area near Lake

Titicaca between 1500 BC and AD 1200. Aymara and other groups were conquered in the 1400s by Incan armies, bringing the area into the Inca Empire. The Incas introduced the Quechua language and a new social system. The Spanish began their conquest in 1532, and by 1538 all of present-day Bolivia was under Spanish control. Countless indigenous people died in forced labor. Known as Upper Peru during Spanish rule, Bolivia was one of the first colonies to rebel. Political uprisings occurred frequently in the 1700s but were always crushed. It was not until the independence movement of 1809 that Upper Peru began to see success. After the 16-year War of Independence, the area gained autonomy on 6 August 1825. It was the last Spanish colony to gain freedom and was named after its liberator, Simón Bolívar.

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

The government attempted to improve conditions and stabilize the country during the 1950s, but a military coup ended the reforms in 1964. A series of coups brought various dictatorships to power, each of them oppressive to the indigenous majority's population. From 1971 to 1978, Hugo Banzer Suárez led an authoritarian military regime that was

credited with creating economic growth but criticized for human-rights abuses. Economic conditions worsened through the 1980s, characterized by spiraling inflation that peaked at 11,700 percent in 1985.

After other leaders stepped down, a representative democracy was finally established in August 1985 with the election of President Víctor Paz Estenssoro. He reduced inflation to less than 20 percent and stabilized the economy. His term ended peacefully in 1989, when Jaime Paz Zamora was elected.

Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada became president in 1993. Significantly, his vice president, Victor Hugo Cárdenas, was Aymara, making Cárdenas the first indigenous person to rise to such a high office in Latin America. Sanchez de Lozada worked to integrate indigenous groups into society, but his plans to export Bolivia's vast stores of natural gas drew public protests, which eventually forced him to resign. In 2005, another Aymara, Evo Morales, became the country's first indigenous president. His socialist government has nationalized the energy industry and championed the new constitution adopted in 2009, which increased the rights of Bolivia's indigenous population and set limits on land ownership. A former coca grower himself, Morales supports legalizing coca plant farming for indigenous uses (as opposed to producing cocaine from the plant). The country continues struggling to end its cycle of poverty.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Bolivia's population of roughly 9.9 million is growing at about 1.72 percent annually. About one-third of the population lives in rural areas. La Paz has more than one million people and Santa Cruz has about the same number. Nearly 60 percent of the total population is of indigenous ancestry, including Quechua (30 percent), Aymara (25 percent), Guaraní, Mojeño, Chimane, and smaller groups. Some 30 percent of the people are *criollo* (or mestizo), who are of mixed indigenous and European heritage. Another 15 percent are of European descent. Quechua Indians are prevalent throughout the country but are especially concentrated near Cochabamba and Sucre; the Aymara are concentrated in the Altiplano.

Language

Bolivia has 37 official languages. The most common are *Castellano* (Spanish), Quechua, and Aymara. Spanish is used in government, schooling, and business and is the native tongue of about 60 percent of the population. Most people speak some Quechua. Indigenous groups speak their own languages, especially in rural areas. However, Quechua and Aymara are often liberally peppered with Spanish words. Many indigenous people from rural areas who move to cities speak Spanish with their families to avoid stigma. Many young indigenous-language speakers also speak Spanish.

Religion

Bolivia has no official religion. Approximately 95 percent of

the people are Roman Catholic. Some indigenous belief systems and an active Protestant minority (*evangélicos*) are also present. Bolivians of the Altiplano mix Aymaran and Quechuan traditions with their Catholic beliefs. For instance, reverence for Pachamama, or goddess Mother Earth, is popular. People toast to her and bless things in her name. It is customary to offer a drink to Mother Earth by pouring a little water on the ground before drinking it. A *ch'alla* is the blessing of any material possession or event by offering symbolic articles and alcohol to *Pachamama* and *Achachila*, gods of the mountains. Homes in rural areas may be given a *ch'alla* every year at *Carnaval*, but they may also pray to the Virgin Mary or other Catholic saints at the same time.

General Attitudes

In Bolivia, time is viewed differently than in North America. People enjoy getting as much pleasure out of an experience as possible, with less regard to how much time they spend. Scheduled events begin late, as all understand that arriving on time is not expected. The Aymara view the past as something they can see in front of them but the future as unseen and therefore behind them.

Bolivians admire honesty and frown upon those who are too proud and who flaunt or talk excessively about their wealth. They do not like confrontation and avoid disagreement. Kindness, gentleness, and concern for another's welfare are keys to friendship in Bolivia. Bolivians like to remind others that they are also "Americans" because they live in South America. They call people from the United States *norteamericanos*.

Divisions exist between society's upper classes—Europeans and mestizos—and indigenous groups, who have often been barred from participating in society because of their race. Those who have wanted to assimilate into society have had to speak Spanish and change their way of dress. Many also adopt Spanish names. The indigenous movement is working to ensure that all the benefits of a democratic society are extended to all citizens without forcing them to abandon their traditions. People of European and mestizo ancestry tend to believe that other groups should assimilate into society by leaving tradition behind and adopting a more Westernized culture.

Personal Appearance

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

Some indigenous people make their clothing out of wool. Common colors include red, black, and off-white. Native men might wear shin-length pants, a shirt, and a thick leather belt. They often wear a poncho and a hat. Women wear a long, dark-colored dress tied at the waist with a colorful belt. They also may wear a small shoulder cape and oval hat. Women

carry babies on their backs in an *aguay* o (a woven square cloth). In the warmer rural areas of Llano and Chaco, the clothes are made of lighter fabrics, and women wear a *tipoy* (a knee-length, straight, sleeveless tunic with a flared collar and hem).

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

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

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

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

Gestures

Bolivians often use hands, eyes, and facial expressions to communicate. To beckon children, one waves the fingers with the palm down. Patting someone on the shoulder signifies friendship. A raised hand, palm outward and fingers extended, twisting quickly from side to side, states “There isn't any” or “no”—a gesture often used by taxi and bus drivers when their vehicles are full. Waving the index finger indicates a strong “no.” One covers the mouth when yawning or coughing. Eye contact in conversation is essential. Avoiding another's eyes shows suspicion, lack of trust, or shyness.

Visiting

Bolivians enjoy visiting one another. Both arranged and unannounced visits are common. Urban visitors generally give flowers or small gifts to the host upon arrival. Hosts might also present visitors with gifts, which are not opened in front of the giver. Hosts make their guests as comfortable as

possible. Compliments given during the meal instead of after will bring a second helping.

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

Eating

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

LIFESTYLE

Family

The family is central to Bolivian society. Many aspects of family life vary according to region. In the western, rural region, the mother of the family is considered the “wise one” of the family. Mothers raise children without much assistance from fathers, who spend most of their time working in the fields. While the father makes most family decisions, the mother has the most influence on household affairs. Grandchildren refer to their grandmother as “mother,” never using the title “grandmother,” which can carry a sense of disaffection or estrangement. In the eastern, rural areas, both parents receive the same devotion from their children, and the father of the family is considered the highest authority in the household.

Children are generally well disciplined and share in family responsibilities. Rural families often have many children, but children often die in infancy. The oldest daughters in a family, often called *mamita* (little mom), are considered second mothers to the younger siblings. Children in rural areas take on many household duties. Boys begin to help their fathers in the fields at age eight, and learn how to be self-sufficient by puberty. Girls learn to raise children and carry out domestic tasks, such as cooking and washing clothes. Although children are taught the importance of education, illiteracy is high among the poor.

Rural children grow up to be parents quickly, marrying

and starting their own families at the age of 16 or 17. They usually live in their own home, away from their parents. As a common old saying states, “*El casado casa quiere*” (Every newlywed wants his own house). Civil wedding ceremonies are often too expensive for rural couples to afford, and many couples live together in common-law arrangements. When parents grow old, their children take them into their homes as a sign of gratitude and love.

In urban families, fathers retain the responsibility of earning money to live on, but mothers also work. Wealthier families hire nursemaids and nannies, leaving the mother to take on more of an administrative role at home. Middle- and upper-class families have one or two children. Children devote their time to school and spend most afternoons doing their homework at home or at classmates' homes. They do not get jobs before graduating high school. Parents encourage their children to pursue education and often support them through college. Undergraduates do not usually marry before graduating. Urban grandparents usually stay in their own homes until they need some assistance and then may live in a nursing home.

Most women work in the home. Without modern conveniences, their work is difficult and time consuming. This situation can prevent women from pursuing work in the formal labor force, but many run small businesses called *tiendas* (sewing, cutting hair, or selling soda and other small items) from their homes. Urban women have the same rights and opportunities as men in Bolivian society. Forty-nine percent of the government cabinet ministers are women.

Housing

A typical rural home is made from local materials such as adobe bricks, mud, rocks, or wooden boards. The floor and walls are usually dirt, topped with straw and wood roofs. Inside, family members tend to sleep on the floor, using dried sheepskin and woven blankets for bedding. If there is a bed, then an entire family may sleep in it. Kitchens are generally freestanding structures, open on all sides and covered by a simple straw roof. Most rural homes have electricity, but a lot do not have indoor plumbing. Bolivians conserve water by using the same water for cooking, washing, watering plants, or laundry. More modern construction is becoming common in some communities, where homes are built with cement-covered walls, corrugated iron roofs, and tiled floors. Urban homes are more likely to have running water, but a lot of them still lack central heating. Many homes harness heat from the sun through skylights or large windows. Some Bolivian families try to generate heat at night by using a *garafa* (propane tank) or a *brasero* (brazier).

Dating and Marriage

In Bolivia, dating is preceded by friendship. In urban areas, the average age to start dating is 13. Classmates meet to do their homework, watch movies, or go to the *plaza*, or the center of the city. In many towns in the evenings, young men and young women like to take walks, where they stroll in groups around the town's central *plaza* to make eye contact and flirt. Young men walk home young women as a sign of courtesy, and while walking, a young man may ask the girl he

is interested in to be his girlfriend. The process of getting acquainted, dating seriously, and being engaged can take as long as three years. In rural areas, some parents arrange marriages between their children and the children of their friends as a way of perpetuating the friendship between the families.

Men generally marry between the ages of 20 and 25, while women marry between ages 19 and 23. People usually do not marry until they have some financial security or property. For a marriage to be legal, a civil ceremony must be performed. However, most couples also have a religious ceremony, followed by a dance and reception. The bridal couple wears their finest clothes for the ceremony. After the religious ceremony, the newlyweds may ride away in a decorated car, driving around the city and honking so that everyone may share in the good news. They often go to the central plaza to take pictures around the fountains and gardens there. Then, family and friends meet the bride and groom at the reception place. In rural areas, the celebration can last as long as a week. Because weddings are expensive, many rural people choose common-law marriages instead. Bolivians wear their wedding rings on the right hand.

In the western area of the country, relatives bring many presents to the reception. While the newlyweds are dancing, friends and family get close and pin money on the clothes of the bridegroom or the bride. On the next day, the bride and groom open their presents. Wedding guests are expected to give the newlyweds presents to start their new life with a well-equipped house. Guests may bring beds, televisions, dining tables, and refrigerators; and it is not uncommon to see an arriving guest followed by a pickup truck bringing furniture. The wedding gifts are counted, and if the total is an odd number, the person who is assigned to count has to buy a gift that has not yet been given. Some guests or relatives may even take out a loan in order to give presents to the newlyweds.

Life Cycle

Most women give birth naturally, since giving birth by cesarean is expensive and is seen as a sign of weakness. In the western region, people believe that the hairier a baby is, the more blessings he comes with. Each parent picks a name for the baby; Bolivians usually name their babies after one of his or her grandparents. Parents in western Bolivia may also choose a name using an ancient astrological calendar with names for each day of the year; many people born on the same day have the same name.

At age one, Bolivian children have their hair cut, and around that age, most Bolivian children are baptized in a Catholic church. Girls pass from childhood into adolescence on their fifteenth birthday, when the family holds a special reception, at which the 15-year old dances the waltz with her friends and family. Young men see their eighteenth birthday as the age of becoming a grown man. Young men are also expected to serve in the national army for a year, usually at the age of 17.

Funerals traditionally consist of three-day ceremonies, which are still common in rural areas. Urban funerals are usually condensed versions. Mourners, all dressed in black,

typically follow the coffin to the city cemetery. Wealthy or high-status Bolivians, unlike their less-wealthy counterparts, are buried above ground in private garden cemeteries. In some regions, the extended family gathers together after the burial to share an abundant feast so that the mourners do not return home in loneliness.

Diet

Potatoes, rice, milk products, fruits, and soups (which often include *quinoa*, a protein-rich grain), are common staples in the Bolivian diet. Starches vary by region: yucca is eaten in the lowlands; corn is plentiful in the valleys; and potatoes are eaten daily in the Altiplano. Bolivia has hundreds of varieties of potatoes prepared in different ways. *Chuños* are freeze-dried potatoes that are used in soups or side dishes when rehydrated. Most foods are fried and seasoned with *llajua* (a spicy salsa). Peanuts may be used in soups (*sopa de maní*) and sauces. Chicken is the most common meat. Southern Bolivians eat a lot of beef and enjoy barbecues. Breakfast usually consists of tea or coffee, bread, and perhaps cheese. In rural areas, breakfast might be a hot drink called *api* made of corn spiced with sugar and cinnamon. Lunch, the main meal, consists of soup and a main dish. In cities, people enjoy *salteñas* (meat or chicken pies made with potatoes, olives, and raisins) as a midmorning snack.

Recreation

Fútbol (soccer) is the national sport. It does not require much equipment, and kids will use almost anything for a ball, from a crumpled paper to a little rock. Basketball, volleyball, and indoor soccer are other common sports. Other popular leisure activities include watching television (in urban areas), visiting with friends, and attending festivals. In the Chaco region, people get together to drink several rounds of yerba mate, an herbal tea. Dancing and singing are popular at various events.

The *plaza*, the center of town, is considered a main spot for recreation. Some small cities have *tilines*, or electronic-game centers, where middle-class kids spend their free time. Home internet service in Bolivia is expensive, so there is one *café internet* in almost every downtown block. Online chatting and LAN gaming have become a popular leisure activity. Adult women usually meet to share a *tecito* (cup of tea) and talk. In Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, and La Paz, movie theatres are becoming very successful.

During vacation times, Bolivians often travel to holy places to renew their faith and promises. They also visit relatives in other parts of the country.

The Arts

Many of Bolivia's cultural traditions have their roots in pre-Inca civilizations. Textiles have changed little from those roots, often incorporating the same dyes and patterns that have been used for hundreds of years. Since colonial times, Bolivians have been using gold and silver to ornament architecture, jewelry, and other objects. Basket weaving and wood carving are common crafts in the Guaraní region.

Music is an integral part of Bolivian culture. Played and promoted throughout the world, it can be divided into three types: fast, happy rhythms from the east and northeast; slow,

romantic, and melancholic rhythms from the Andes Mountains; and happy, romantic rhythms from the central valleys. Much of the music is characterized by distinctive instruments: panpipes (*zampoña*), vertical flutes, various percussion instruments, and the *charango*, a 12-string, guitar-like instrument made from an armadillo shell. The *cueca*, *tinku*, and *saya* are traditional dances.

Holidays

Most holidays in Bolivia have fixed dates, but activities are often moved to the day closest to the weekend. The three most important holidays are Independence Day, *Carnaval*, and the Holy Week before Easter. Independence Day, held on 6 August, is the anniversary of the establishment of the Republic in 1825. Parades are held, with the ending points at a fair, amusement park, or festival.

Carnaval begins forty days before Easter, on the Saturday before Ash Wednesday. The month starts with a parade in which *comparsas*, or groups of people dressed up and dancing, singing, playing music, and yelling, follow the parade floats for miles. On the last day of *Carnaval*, Tuesday, people everywhere in Bolivia perform the *ch'alla* ritual, which consists of sprinkling a "sacred" liquid to bless one's things and making burnt offerings unto *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). Throughout the month of *Carnaval*, Bolivians drench each other with water balloons. Dancing, wearing costumes, and pouring water on people are common during *Carnaval*. The city of Oruro holds one of the biggest *Carnaval* celebrations in the region. Almost every *pueblo* (village) has unique *fiestas* in honor of its patron saint or the Virgin Mary. These local events are noted for their music and colorful costumes.

During the Holy Week before Easter, people repent of all the wrongdoings committed during *Carnaval*. Catholics refrain from eating meat (only fish is allowed), and in some cities, people crawl on their knees along a processional route as an act of faith and devotion.

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

SOCIETY

Government

The president (currently Evo Morales), the vice president, and the cabinet form the executive branch, based at La Paz. *El Congreso Nacional* (National Congress), also in La Paz, consists of a 36-seat Chamber of Senators and a 130-seat Chamber of Deputies. The Supreme Court sits at Sucre, the legal capital. The president, vice president, and congressional representatives serve five-year terms. Voting is mandatory at

age 18 for married Bolivians and mandatory at age 21 for single Bolivians.

Economy

With natural resources such as tin, natural gas, crude oil, zinc, silver, gold, lead, and tungsten, Bolivia's major industry is mining. Others include coffee and food production, textiles, and timber. Roughly half of the labor force is engaged in agriculture. Coca (used in making cocaine) has been the largest (illicit) cash crop, though coca exports have been reduced in recent years. Efforts to stop coca trafficking are complicated by the drug's lucrative profits and centuries-old status as a traditional crop. It has many legitimate uses in society, including medicinal and dietary, and is a fundamental part of the culture.

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

Massive debt forgiveness by foreign creditors of more than 80 percent of Bolivia's external debt has given a boost to the country's economic potential. The economy is growing, albeit slowly, and inflation is decreasing as the government continues to cut expenditures. The 2008 global financial crisis led to a sharp decrease in both prices and demand for Bolivia's exports. The currency is the *boliviano* (BOB).

Transportation and Communications

Throughout its modern history, Bolivia has been handicapped by its landlocked location and lack of internal transportation and communications. Only the major highways are paved. Buses, taxis, and trains are the most common forms of transportation. Buses, or *micros*, are cheap and go through the town's main arteries, but are not safe, comfortable, or fast. More expensive minivans are faster and less crowded. Travelers in a hurry take taxis or less-expensive *trufis*, which operate like buses and often stop to pick up additional passengers going the same way. Traffic jams and quarrels between drivers are common. Bicycles are common in rural areas. In places with little road access, people ride horses or horse-drawn carts. Small villages may also have a motorcycle taxi service, which saves people from spending money on their own cars.

Airlines connect major cities and allow travelers to avoid rugged terrain. Flying is only used as a form of transportation for business executives or people in extreme urgency. Some people also fly to parts of Bolivia that are inaccessible by roads, such as the Bolivian Amazon.

Several radio and television stations are in operation. Most people use radio to keep themselves up to date on the news. Newspapers are for companies and institutions; regular citizens do not often read them. News channel owners are closely related to politics, so news always has an evident political spin to it. Most people in urban areas have cell

phones. Telephones at home are declining in use. For those without electricity, stores will charge their cell phones for a small fee. In areas without cell phone signals, there are call centers where people make and receive calls. Though cell phones are widely used in urban areas, calling is expensive, so texting is the cheapest and most common way to use a cell phone. Internet cafés are the most popular way to access the internet, because home internet service is too expensive for most. The postal service is considered unsecure, so people prefer to send their packages through the *encomienda*, or bus mail service.

Education

Schooling is compulsory for Bolivians aged 5 to 18. Bolivia's educational system is organized in four levels: kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, and higher education. Students in their last year of secondary school may attend parallel to military service in order to be ready to go to college once they graduate. Students must pass an entrance exam to be admitted to one of Bolivia's universities. Every Bolivian state (*departamento*) has its own public university. There are several private universities as well.

Higher education usually lasts for five years; students graduate with bachelor's degrees after defending a thesis or a capstone project. A student who wants to pursue his or her education can take postgraduate courses, but these paths are not usually pursued. Bolivian students are responsible for buying their own uniforms and learning materials. Teachers use traditional teaching methods in which the teacher instructs the class and assigns in-class exercises and homework to the students. Blackboards and desks are considered necessary elements in the classroom. Technology is rarely used while teaching. Students have workbooks that they are expected to keep clean and updated. A student may know the subject very well and pass all the exams but may fail the year if he or she does not turn in an updated workbook. Cheating (*chanchullo*) on a test is punished with a failing grade.

School conditions are poor. Most schools are public, but families with money send their children to parochial or private schools. Though illiteracy is declining, problems still exist. Less than half of all children complete their primary education, and less than one-third go on to secondary school. Illiteracy is common in rural areas due to the lack of educational infrastructure. Strikes, long distances to schools, and family labor needs contribute to this problem. In the past, Spanish was the language used in all schools. Recent reforms require schools to teach in both Spanish and indigenous languages. Religious tolerance exists in schools.

Health

Sanitation facilities are poor. Contaminated water is the most serious health threat, resulting in cholera, hepatitis, yellow fever, malaria, and other diseases. Tap water must be boiled, but wood is hard to find and gas is expensive. Many rural areas lack running water and electricity. Local nurses and doctors have been training *responsables populares de salud* (community healthcare workers) in basic skills. These trainees increase public health awareness and help serve the needs of the rural population. The infant mortality rate is high

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

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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POPULATION & AREA

Population	9,947,418 (rank=84)
Area, sq. mi.	424,164 (rank=29)
Area, sq. km.	1,098,581

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	95 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	96 of 155 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$4,700
Adult literacy rate	93% (male); 81% (female)
Infant mortality rate	43 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	65 (male); 70 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).