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States at Regional Risk (SARR)  
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Northern Andes Component: “Off-Centered States”  
Executive Summary

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Introduction

The Americas component of Emory’s States at Regional Risk Project focuses on the northern Andean region of South America, particularly the countries of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. This region has been at the center of hemispheric conflicts concerning oil, coca production, drug trafficking, and paramilitary operations since the end of the Cold War. The competing influences of the United States and neighboring Venezuela fuel an already tense political polarization among the region’s presidencies. Ecuador and Bolivia champion versions of “21<sup>st</sup> century socialism,” while Colombia and Peru remain or move increasingly to the political right. Popular social movements of historically minoritized peoples have increasingly ousted conservative heads of state and elected new representatives to key positions in government, including the recent presidential election of Evo Morales in Bolivia. Outside observers have called parts of the Andes the world’s first potentially “post-neoliberal” region and are looking to its countries with either hopes or fears of an influential model of how states may be governing differently in the years ahead.

Regional Conference

Drawing on pilot trips to the Andean region made by Dr. Christopher Krupa, the SARR directorate determined Quito, Ecuador to be the most suitable location for the SARR Andes conference. The Quito branch of the prestigious Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales—FLACSO) was chosen as the regional co-organizer of the conference.

The SARR northern Andes regional conference, “**Off-Centered States: Political Formation and Deformation in the Andes**,” was held at the FLACSO campus in Quito, Ecuador, on May 27 and

28, 2010. The conference brought together 21 participants from seven countries, including our focus countries in the region (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia). The conference was attended by some 50 observers and audience members. Importantly, the conference was fully bi-lingual between Spanish and English, with simultaneous translation available via wireless headsets for all audience members as well as for presenters and panelists. Bilingualism enhanced the both the rigor and vigor of discussion as well as making broader participation possible in the selection of conference participants.

Our goal was to explore issues of state risk, instability, and transformation from a critical angle that questioned the foundations of state power and presence in the northern Andes since colonial times. Our previous work led us to propose that 'states' in the region had been rather porous, ill-defined, and uncoordinated institutions -- deeply inflected with, and relying heavily upon, ostensibly non-political institutions in the process of governing. Existing frameworks for understanding current conflicts in the Andes tend to frame these as consequences of macro-processes of state decentralization and recentralization, frameworks which still propose identifiable and functional centers of government and which, we felt, missed much of the more dispersed way that political power works in Andean societies, including at the core of many of its current conflicts.

We requested conference participants to consider state power in relation to extra-official, quotidian, and frequently invisible or partially concealed permutations of rule in the lives of Andean people. These encompass actors who have sought to carry out projects under the ostensible umbrella of 'state,' how these attempts are legitimated (if at all), and what challenges or competitions arise from them. We were interested to identify how performances of statecraft coordinated or conflicted with national political structures as well as with intra-regional and trans-national influences.

Our intention was to (1) provoke reflection among international and regional experts about the sources of current tensions in the northern Andes; (2) assess the possibilities for new and influential forms of governance in the region; and (3) foster dialogue between scholars and those working in state and civil society institutions concerning the insights of the conference.

### Findings

Many factors contributing to current regional tensions can be traced to the colonial period and the transition to independent Republics during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was agreed that common interpretations of Andean states tend to see them as overly centralized systems. This misattribution of state centralization has been variously associated with the long and violent period of Crown rule in the region, the Church-State nexus in governing local populations, and the development of bureaucratic networks that continued into the Republican period. Across

various contexts, misattribution of state centralization has facilitated misunderstanding and misinterpreting concerning political conflicts in the region. Recently, this includes the assumed weight of national political power associated with charismatic presidents and their allies while expansive margins of national territory remain effectively ungoverned by the State per se.

Colonial history reveals deep and unresolved struggles between various power blocs—clergy, landowners, government officials, urban settlers—over the right to govern over or extract surplus from indigenous societies and territories. Each of these diverse practices was presented as if representing and advancing the political interests of the Crown. Definitive features of the state—such as the establishment of a singular and universal legal code—were shown to be lacking well into the Republican era in many Andean countries, allowing—and even delegating—local power holders to act as the state in the lives of local people. This pattern continued into the Republican era and has defined the course of political struggles in and between countries of the northern Andes to the present.

Summaries from individual papers and robust conference discussion sessions suggest the following country-specific trends:

In **Ecuador**, much of the work of the State after Independence was literally ‘farmed out’ to rural hacienda owners, elite men who were granted private ownership of indigenous territories in exchange for collecting tribute, educating, and evangelizing those living on them. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, large-scale “outreach” campaigns were devised by central state officials – often via public health campaigns and offers of other welfare services -- in an attempt to wrest governmental authority back from private powers and local rulers. These attempts were only partially fulfilled many decades later by aggressive agrarian reform projects during the 1960s and 1970s. Even then, the state needed to seek external support from U.S.-based development initiatives (such as the Andean Mission) to extend its reach into rural and particularly indigenous areas.

Under more recent and expanded celebrations of multicultural democracy and state decentralization, indigenous leaders have been increasingly elected to Ecuadorian positions of local and even national state power. They have used instruments of government such as taxation, property law, labor rights, and so on to counteract historic biases and abuses perpetrated by the state or those acting in its name. Rafael Correa’s 2008 presidential election indexed a major shift in national politics. Claiming to “end the long and sad night of neoliberalism” and lead the country towards “socialism for the twenty-first century,” Correa allied himself with Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez in a pro-poor, anti-oligarchy platform. Results from Correa’s first two and a half years in office have been met with mixed reviews. His self-professed “recentralization” of state programs—which includes a new constitution written by constituent assembly, the nationalization of strategic resources, and a charismatic weekly

television broadcast—has extended new forms of social rights and protections to marginalized populations but has simultaneously administered those populations weakly through institutions of government and their proxies rather than through the organic and traditional organizations that are nominally called on to represent them.

In **Bolivia**, elites in two regions of the country, La Paz and Sucre, operated independently as twin national capitals throughout the early twentieth century. Neither center was able to amass as much wealth or political power as the tin barons who controlled mines in outlying departments. As a result, Bolivian nationalism for much of the twentieth century revolved more around the commodity of tin than the political character of its people or government. Lacking a clear center of political power did not mean that Bolivians were outside the reach of state—only that the practice of government, for many, was taken up by mining companies or by other industrial groups competing for political power with them. Bolivia's recent high profile conflicts—violent “water wars,” struggles with the U.S. government around coca growing, and rejection by whole regions of Bolivia of its elected president Evo Morales (indigenous and leader of a coca-growers' union)—can in many ways be traced to these earlier Republican struggles between private and public powers for political power and the relative autonomy of sub-national territories from the central state.

Geographically between Ecuador and Bolivia, **Peru** has curiously not followed the path of these two countries in their elections of professed left-leaning presidents. Instead, the Peruvian national government remains committed to a relatively orthodox post-cold war political agenda of neoliberalism. While lacking both the general dominion of the hacienda system that characterizes highland Ecuador's political history and an industrial power equivalent to Bolivia's miners, Peru has nevertheless wrestled with the problem of constructing a centralized state with administrative dominion over its so-called margins. Throughout the 19th century, many rural state offices did not follow even the most basic protocols for organizing municipal government. In their place arose hybrid forms of governance that mixed liberal principles of rule with pre-colonial indigenous political structures that had been formally outlawed almost a century earlier. By the middle of the 20th century, much of the work of the Peruvian state involved tracking down and ferreting out a radical underground political party it was never sure existed. All the while, this party, known as APRA, was in fact clandestinely providing much of what the official state had promised Peruvians but was unable to provide—largely because of its fantastical fear of usurpation by this very party. In later decades, movements such as the Shining Path constituted special challenges to the Peruvian government. More recently, Peruvians in the southeast corner of the country have protested for a promised inter-oceanic highway to pass through their community, hopefully reducing their sense of marginalization from national political and economic structures—the very promise the state had made them in its campaign for the road. The state's violent negation of their request, shifting the road's

course to better serve a Brazilian industry, reflects the broader cycle of hope and despair through which Andean people have engaged the state for centuries.

Set in the above regional and historical context, **Colombia's** current conflicts seem less like deviant exceptions to an otherwise stable system of strongly centralized and functioning states than an enhanced version of political tensions that have long affecting the northern Andean region. International attention on Colombia has largely focused on the southern Putumayo region, where the bulk of its drug producing and processing operations are located and where a large part of the violence between guerrilla groups and paramilitary organizations continues to take place. Colombian officials have portrayed Putumayo as a zone over which the state has lost its sovereignty. Putumayo residents now appeal to the United States as its "proxy citizens" for reparations for the decades-long counter-narcotics operations, aerial fumigations, and security missions that the U.S. has carried out in the region. Local politicians claim to be unable to work free of the channels of elite families that have manipulated party politics in Putumayo throughout the twentieth century. In contrast to conventional representations of this region as a stateless frontier zone, it appears that there are too many actors competing to perform state functions in the region, including, as various participants pointed out, the United States government and the development planning organizations it has subcontracted to carry out its Plan Colombia initiatives. Similar patterns have taken hold as well in other parts of the country, including struggles between labor unions and paramilitary groups substituting for, and in some cases coordinating with, the central state in doing the material work of government.

### Conclusions

The findings and contributions of the SARR Quito conference can be summarized in four respects. Collectively, these represent a novel direction in theorizing Andean political systems and the tensions they face.

1. The definitive tasks of the State have never been monopolized by the central government in any of the northern Andean countries. Other powerful actors, local and trans-national, have long appropriated or been delegated the capacity to act as state proxies in various contexts. This diffusion of state functions among diverse actors is not an exception to how political power normally works in the Andes but is integral to what the state has been and continues to be in the region.
2. This historic diversification and privatization of state functions makes it difficult to discern zones of strong versus weak state control or to map political centers and margins in conventional terms in much of the northern Andes. Frequently, actors who appear to take on the imprimatur of the State in local worlds are not officially sanctioned.

3. The 'relative autonomy' of the state from other structures of power – based on class, race, region, and so on — is very weak. The near inability of Andean states to convincingly present themselves as universal and disinterested modes of government with a natural monopoly on the right to rule has led to a chronic crisis of legitimacy for the official / central state in these countries.
4. The above cycle comes full circle: local or trans-national actors may be able to legitimize their rule more easily than the central state by providing populations with services long promised but rarely realized by the state -- or by abstracting themselves entirely from national-political conflicts between elite factions. This is how guerrilla organizations, paramilitary groups, drug lords, tin barons, hacienda owners, underground political parties, emerging indigenous leaders, coca leaf union leaders, and others have been able to administer various populations under their political orbit and upscale that support to propose of new sorts of state systems for the Andean future.

### Shortcomings

Our efforts to involve state representatives and those of social movements were not particularly successful. This was due in large part to the current political situation in Ecuador, in which most academic institutions, social movements, and civil society bases are currently negotiating their uncertain autonomy from the Correa administration. This disjunction is in significant respects a function of the off-centered nature of state dynamics on which the conference itself focused. This suggests that a yet less "top-down" approach is needed to more fully to articulate informed participation and dialogue among scholars, civil society leaders, and policy makers in the northern Andes.

### Future Plans

Drs. Christopher Krupa and David Nugent are presently compiling the conference papers into an edited volume, which will be published in English with a North American university press and in Spanish with FLACSO. These editions are projected for completion and publication submission by late 2010 or early 2011. Drs. Krupa and Nugent, in collaboration with the SARR governing body, plan to use the release of the Spanish edition of *Off-Centered States* as an impetus to discuss the conference findings with state and civil society representatives in Ecuador and Peru and to consider a follow-up, dialogue-centered conference with them shortly after. Funds presently associated with the SARR project do not permit support this follow-up work per se, but these productive possibilities may be explored in a later proposal to extend the work of SARR further in the future.