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From issue: **Natural Resource Extraction in Latin America** (Winter 2013)

### ■ AQ FEATURE

# Resource Nationalism: Beyond Ideology

by

[Hal Weitzman](#)



Photo: Nicolas Villaume

## The hemisphere revives an old policy standby.

Latin America’s political Left has displayed symptoms of bipolarity for much of the past decade.

An early purveyor of this diagnosis was Jorge Castañeda, former Mexican foreign secretary (2001–2003), who in 2004 identified what he called “two Lefts” in a piece for *Project Syndicate*. One Left had “truly socialist and progressive roots” that was “following pragmatic, sensible and realistic paths.” The other stemmed from “a populist, purely nationalist past” that had “proven much less responsive to modernizing influences.”<sup>1</sup>

In a 2006 essay for *Foreign Affairs*, Castañeda expanded the argument. He said Latin America’s overall leftward shift was driven by two wings: moderate parties and movements led by reformed socialists who had come to embrace “a more or less orthodox market framework” and a more radical set of populists whose main aim was to seize control over sources of revenue and who were “much more interested in policy as an instrument for attaining and conserving power than in power as a tool for making policy.”<sup>2</sup> His model was underpinned by the assumption that the latter camp—the far Left—would quickly collapse as its economic policies proved unsustainable, thus paving the way for the free-market reforms gaining traction around the hemisphere in the 1980s and 1990s.

But Latin America’s Left has not followed Castañeda’s model...

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