

FROM "PARLIAMENTARIZED" TO "PURE" PRESIDENTIALISM: BOLIVIA AFTER OCTOBER 2003

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From October 2003, when Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada resigned the presidency, to January 2006, when Evo Morales was sworn into the office, an important shift in the organization of presidential power occurred in Bolivia. The events of the past few years can be viewed through different perspectives: as a rejection of neoliberalism and globalization, as a signal of Latin America's "shift to the left," as a return to the country's tradition of political instability, as a sign of a new Bolivian "social revolution," as evidence of the new rising power of indigenous millenarian movements, among others. This paper focuses on one significant detail often overlooked in recent analyses of Bolivian politics: the transition from "parliamentarized" presidentialism in place from 1985-2002 to "pure" presidentialism. Even before Evo Morales assumed office, Bolivia's presidential system had shifted away from a multi-party coalition-based executive system. This shift—which brings Bolivia's political system closer into alignment with typical Latin American presidential democratic systems—hides some of the unique (and still relevant) features of Bolivia's constitutional system.

Though nominally a presidential system, Bolivia's constitutional design is (still) marked by unique factors that resemble conventional parliamentary systems: A combination of proportional representation electoral system (which is common in other presidential systems) and selection of the chief executive by the legislature (which is not). Since October 2003, Bolivia's presidential system has more closely aligned itself with the conventional model of presidential democracy common throughout Latin America: A chief executive whose source of legitimacy is independent from the legislature. As such, Bolivia's chief executives recently faced the same dilemmas, pressures, and temptations as more typical Latin American presidents.

This paper focuses on two of Bolivia's most recent presidents: Carlos Mesa (2003-2005) and Evo Morales (2006-present). After assuming the office of president upon Sánchez de Lozada's resignation, Mesa sought to govern as an independent and was frequently thwarted by a hostile legislature. In contrast, Morales—who was popularly elected in the December 2005 elections and whose party (MAS, Movement Towards Socialism) holds a majority in the lower house (though not in the Senate)—has been comparably more forceful in pursuing his own policy agenda. Despite their several differences, the strategies pursued by both Mesa and Morales fit the literature on presidentialism (particularly the literatures on



“delegative democracy” and “populism”) in ways that differ from their predecessors. Both have frequently tried to sideline the legislature and even at times their own party (in Morales’s case), appealing directly to a popular mandate.

This paper concludes with some comments on the future of Bolivia’s presidential system. A new draft constitution (if approved by popular referendum) will significantly alter the nature of Bolivia’s constitutional design.¹ These include proposals to eliminate the provisions in Article 90 of the current constitution, which provides for the selection of the executive by the legislature in cases where no candidate wins a majority of the popular vote, with a more conventional majority runoff system and the possibility of indefinite reelection.² While such a proposal is understandable in the recent Bolivian context—especially as long-ignored subaltern popular sectors seek to establish a more “majoritarian” vision of democracy—it would steer the Bolivian system further towards “pure” presidentialism. Despite the appeal of a directly elected president, this paper argues that parliamentarized presidentialism is still a viable model and that it may be more appealing to move closer to parliamentarism, than away from it.

It is, of course, important to emphasize that between 2003 and 2008, the institutional framework of parliamentarized presidentialism has not yet changed. Both Mesa and Morales operated under the same constitutional constraints as their predecessors. But formal, legal provisions only tell half the story. While Mesa and Morales acted as chief executives under a constitution that allowed for legislative election of the executive, neither of the two was elected in this way. Mesa, because he succeeded a deposed and unpopular president; Morales, because he was directly elected by a popular majority. Although for different reasons, both staked their political legitimacy on sources outside the “parliamentarized presidentialism” framework.

It is also important to remember that in the early 1980s Bolivian politics was highly unstable and polarized. The institutional framework that allowed parties to come together in coalitional “pacts” may have saved Bolivian democracy from crib death in 1985. Parliamentarized presidentialism may not guarantee “more democratic” form of governance or social life (no institutional design can). But the experience of stable multi-party politics from 1985 through 2002 should not be lightly discarded. The present “Bolivian crisis” (as it is commonly called) demonstrates that polarized winner-take-all politics is a real danger in deeply divided societies. Bolivians, like most Latin Americans, are not likely to adopt a parliamentary system. But, as the earlier Bolivian experience shows, it is perhaps possible to “engineer” presidentialism in ways that bring it closer to the parliamentary model.

The “Perils” of Presidentialism Revisited

The consequences of presidential democracy have been widely debated and I will only briefly summarize that ongoing debate here. In the

inaugural issue of the *Journal of Democracy*, Juan Linz initiated a basic critique of the “perils” of presidential democracy (Linz 1990; Linz and Valenzuela 1994). The basic argument is simple: Presidential systems are less likely to lead to the democratic consolidation of third wave democracies because of two key institutional features. The first is “dual legitimacy.” Because legislatures are separately elected, it is difficult to determine which of the two branches of government is the more “legitimate” representative of the popular will. The second is “temporal rigidity.” Because the chief executive is elected for a specific term, an unpopular, ineffective, or even incompetent executive is not easily removed from office. The track record of “interrupted” presidencies (Valenzuela 2004) suggests that the critical view of presidential democracy is not easily dismissed.³ In contrast to the poor track record of presidentialism in Latin America (and elsewhere), many have advocated parliamentary democracy.

The debate over the merits of presidentialism has been extensive. Many have criticized the Linzian view for oversimplifying the dichotomy between presidentialism and parliamentarism, and for exaggerating the dangers of presidentialism while too readily dismissing the potential drawbacks of parliamentarism (Horowitz 1990; Shugart and Carey 1992; Mainwaring and Shugart 1997; Colomer and Negretto 2005; Cheibub 2007). Others pointed out that there are significant variations between different presidential systems and that other factors—particularly electoral systems—have dramatic consequences for how presidential systems function (Jones 1995; Nohlen and Fernández 1998). By the late 1990s, several scholars had focused on the “style” of presidential politics emerging in the region and began discussing “delegative democracy” (O’Donnell 1994), the rise of “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Way 2002), or a resurgence of “populism” (Weyland 1995).

Overall, the evidence does suggest that presidential democracy is prone to serious problems—particularly in Latin America. In many cases, the unfortunate combination of list proportional electoral systems for the legislature coupled with a second round runoff system for the president has led to a high frequency of minoritarian presidents. Faced with such situations, many Latin American presidents have abused their powers, often radically eroding the quality of their respective democracies. In other cases, presidents have been weak and ineffective, which precipitated political crises that again eroded the country’s democracy. Hugo Chávez (in Venezuela), Alberto Fujimori (in Peru), and Carlos Menem (in Argentina) are examples of the first extreme; Abdala Bucaram and Jamil Mahuad (in Ecuador), Sánchez de Lozada (in Bolivia), and Jorge Serrano (in Guatemala) are examples of the latter extreme. Regardless of whether parliamentarism is a desirable or even viable solution to the region’s problems—whether in terms of governance and stability—it is clear that presidential democracy does not have a good track record in Latin America.

It is unlikely that Latin America’s republics will abandon presidentialism for parliamentarism any time soon. The cultural and historical

legacies that encourage presidentialism are, perhaps, too strong. Yet the literature on presidentialism suggests that some variations of presidential democracy are more likely to endure than others. Thus, it is possible that presidential systems could be “engineered” in ways that bring elements of parliamentarism into the political system. The Bolivian case, from 1985 through 2002, offers such a model.

Presidentialism, Populism, and Delegative Democrats

An important focus on the comparative democratization literature on Latin America (and beyond) has been on the tendency of some presidents to revert to (semi-) authoritarian practices. The resurgence of a new generation of populist leaders and a new type of populism has subsequently become an important area of research—and one that is compatible with the criticisms of presidential democracy. Though in many ways conceptually different, Guillermo O’Donnell’s (1994) description of “delegative democracy” and Kurt Weyland’s (2001) conceptualization of “populism” focus on the tendencies of popularly elected, presidential executives. While O’Donnell’s “delegative democracy” describes the *kind* of democracy in which executives are able to govern without significant horizontal accountability, such executives can also be classified as “populists.”⁴ Not all populist executives use openly “authoritarian” tactics, of course. What they share in common, however, is that they rely primarily on their personal charisma, seeking to establish a close personal link with “the people” at the cost of de-emphasizing more institutional means of representation.

This paper uses the terms “populist” and “delegative democrat” interchangeably. Here, it focuses on the concept’s political, rather than economic (or “policy”) dimensions. This includes a wide range of tools populist presidents use—including “elections, plebiscites, mass demonstrations, and most recently opinion polls” (Weyland 2001, 12)—to overpower their opponents by demonstrating their popular (and personal) legitimacy. In such instances, presidents rely on charismatic foundations of legitimacy and seek to reduce or altogether cut their dependence on more institutional means of authority: the courts, the legislature, even their own political party. In short, political authority becomes increasingly personalized and centralized around a president who claims—and seeks to demonstrate—a close, personal connection with “the people” and their interests.

Like many Latin American countries, Bolivia has a legacy of populism (Mitchell 1977; Brienen 2007). The National Revolutionary Movement (MNR)—which carried out the 1952 “National Revolution”—was modeled on Peru’s American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) and once in power sought to emulate Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Unlike class-based populist movements (such as Peronism), Bolivian populism tends towards integrationist, multi-class, corporatist movements (perhaps better described as “national” populism). After the attempt to establish an MNR single-party state failed, Bolivia was

governed by a series of populist military dictatorships from 1964 through 1978. One of the common features of the civilian MNR regime (1952-1964) and the military regimes that followed (1964-1982) was a dismal view of “partisan” politics, which was criticized for its divisiveness. None of the military regimes attempted to build an institutionalized party base while in power.

Bolivia’s democratic transition was hindered by the lack of institutionalized political parties. Instead, the political landscape of the early 1980s was marked by a large number of poorly institutionalized and ideologically vague electoral vehicles dominated by individual personalities. Many of these were the same figures from the “national revolutionary” period: Víctor Paz Estenssoro, Hernán Siles Zuazo, Hugo Banzer, and a number of lesser figures.⁵ Political campaigns of this period can be categorized as “politics as war” and early efforts at democratization were doomed by the unwillingness of political leaders to cede power to others as the populist mode of politics fostered highly divisive zero-sum political struggles. Multiparty accommodations or power sharing were not yet considered. All this changed with the introduction of “pacted” governments in the late 1980s.

Thus, the focus of this paper is not on populism per se, but rather on the apparent tendency of “pure” presidential executives to move in that direction. It is significant that Bolivian executives have historically fit the pattern of populist leaders. Both prior to 1985 and after 2003, political power was heavily concentrated in chief executives who did not rely on political parties and legislatures as popular intermediaries. Like all democratic leaders, Bolivia’s presidents from 1985 through 2003 also exhibited “populist” traits.⁶ But these were tempered by their reliance on the “pacted” multiparty coalitions that were a cornerstone of “parliamentarized” presidentialism.

“Parliamentarized” Presidentialism, 1985–2002

In the 1990s, Bolivia ceased to be a Latin American basket case and instead became a potential model. During this time, Bolivia was governed by alternating governments, which were themselves comprised of multiparty coalitions. Under the first Sánchez de Lozada administration (1993-1997), the country embarked on an ambitious series of reforms aimed at increasing citizen participation, representation, and government accountability. The 1994 decentralization reforms, known as *Participación Popular*, became a model for the region (MDH-SNPP 1997). The country even seemed inoculated (if not immune) to the rise of new populist movements across the region. While neopopulist movements such as Conscience of the Fatherland (CONDEPA) and Civic Solidarity Union (UCS) were present in Bolivia, they were accommodated into the political party system, which itself tended towards a moderate multipartism. How do we explain this transformation? How did Bolivia, one of the most unstable countries in the region, enjoy more than a decade of political stability?⁷

The answer lies partly with its unique presidential system. From 1985 through 2002, Bolivian political elites employed a system described by René Antonio Mayorga (1997; 2005) as “parliamentarized presidentialism.”⁸ It is important to understand how Bolivia’s remarkable political stability of the 1990s (which coincides with this institutional period) was, in large part, shaped by this unique institutional model. It is equally important, of course, to carefully assess the limitations on this system in order to understand how it failed to defuse the social and political crisis that led to the country’s first “interrupted” presidency since 1985. We turn to the latter question later. First, let us briefly describe Bolivia’s parliamentarized presidentialism.

Parliamentarized presidentialism is characterized by a combination of formal institutions and informal rules whose key features are:

- 1) A fused-ballot list proportional representation (list-PR) electoral system, in which the president heads a list of party candidates.
- 2) Congressional election of the president (if no candidate-list wins a popular majority of valid votes).
- 3) Informal semi-consociational norms that encourage multiparty post-electoral coalition building (or “pacts”).

The constitution and the Electoral Code formally proscribe the first two features. The provision for congressional selection of the president is outlined in Article 90 of the current constitution. Article 90 stipulates that, in the event that no presidential candidate (and his or her list) wins a majority of the popular vote, the newly elected legislature must select a new president from among the frontrunners.⁹ In 1994, the constitution was modified to limit the congressional election of the president to the two frontrunners (a reduction from the previous option to vote for three frontrunners).

In addition, the fused-ballot electoral system binds the legislature and the president closely together. The composition of both the Senate and the House of Deputies reflect the votes cast for the single party lists headed by the presidential candidate (a vote for president is an automatic vote for a party list). Thus, unlike in “pure” presidentialism, the executive and legislature share the same source of electoral legitimacy. Despite the change to a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system before the 1997 election, the legislature still largely reflects the results of this “plurinominal” portion of the ballot. Bolivian voters cast two ballots: one for their local (“uninominal”) representative and the other for president. The presidential votes are used to determine seat distribution in the 27-member Senate and to award the remainder (nearly half) of the seats in the 130-member House of Deputies in compensatory (rather than “parallel”) fashion.

In the five elections between 1985 and 2002, no presidential candidate was able to win a majority of the popular vote (see Table 1). Yet each of the five presidents that emerged from the post-electoral legislative selection process built a majority governing coalition. Already by 1989, these

Table 1. Bolivian Presidential Frontrunners and Governments, 1985–2002

Election	Party	Presidential candidate (winner in italics)	Percent of valid vote	Seats in Congress	
				By party	By coalition
1985	ADN	Hugo Banzer	32.8	51	
	<i>MNR</i>	<i>Víctor Paz Estenssoro</i>	30.4	59	110
	MIR	Jaime Paz Zamora	10.2	16	
1989	MNR	Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada	25.7	49	
	ADN	Hugo Banzer	25.2	46	
	<i>MIR</i>	<i>Jaime Paz Zamora</i>	21.8	41	87
1993	<i>MNR</i>	<i>Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada</i>	35.6	69	97
	AP ^a	Hugo Banzer	21.1	43	
	CONDEPA	Carlos Palenque	14.3	14	
1997	<i>ADN</i>	<i>Hugo Banzer</i>	22.8	43	96 ^b
	MNR	Juan Carlos Durán	18.6	30	
2002	<i>MNR</i>	<i>Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada</i>	22.5	47	88
	MAS	Evo Morales	20.9	35	

Data from Bolivia's Corte Nacional Electoral. Figures only represent those candidates who were eligible for second-round selection by the legislature; candidates who went to be selected president are in bold. Total number of seats in legislature is 157 (130 in the House of Deputies and 27 in the Senate).

^aAP (Patriotic Accord) was a coalition between ADN and MIR.

^bFigure does not include CONDEPA's 22 seats; CONDEPA was dismissed from the coalition on August 6, 1998.

multiparty pacts had become a critical component of Bolivian politics. The post-electoral coalitions did more than merely produce majority legislative support for incoming presidents—they established multi-party portfolio coalitions. The weeks following general elections became a period of intense inter-party negotiations, as presidential hopefuls lobbied incoming legislators and their parties. In exchange for legislative support, new presidents signed agreements with rival parties. Spelled out in the various coalitional pacts, incoming presidents agreed to share executive power by awarding ministerial and other high government posts to coalition member parties.

The coalition pacts did more than merely select new presidents: they substantially altered parties' behavior. Two significant examples include the 1989 MIR-ADN alliance and the 1993 MNR-led "Plan de Todos"

coalition. After an electoral impasse left the two center-right candidates (Paz Estenssoro and Banzer) in a virtual tie in 1989, Jaime Paz Zamora, the center-left Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) presidential candidate crafted an alliance with Banzer's Democratic Nationalist Action (ADN). The move was controversial because MIR had originally been founded in 1971 to resist the Banzer military dictatorship. In exchange for the presidency, Paz Zamora agreed to form a joint cabinet with ADN, naming the ADN vice presidential candidate as vice president (rather than the MIR candidate), forming a joint Committee of the Patriotic Accord (headed by Banzer) with extensive input into policy decisions, and an agreement for MIR to officially support a Banzer presidential bid in 1993. The Patriotic Accord government was thus much more than a legislative coalition: It was an explicit co-government between two previously rival parties.

By 1993, post-electoral pacts were expected. That year, Sánchez de Lozada secured his presidential election by including two new parties into his governing coalition. The first was the populist UCS; the other was the center-left Free Bolivia Movement (MBL), a former MIR splinter. Despite placing first by a wide margin over the second runner up (and a significant legislative plurality),¹⁰ the MNR formed a coalition that gave significant cabinet (and sub-cabinet) representation to UCS and MBL. The 1997 and 2002 elections followed this pattern, with parties and candidates maneuvering for post-electoral coalitions even before votes were cast. As such, coalitions were avenues for either consensus building or cooption (or both) around a neoliberal political and economic project. What is significant is that after the 1989 Patriotic Accord government, governments increasingly operated within the constraints of their multiparty pact agreements. Though these agreements could be reevaluated (as when CONDEPA was dismissed from the ADN-led coalition in 1998), much of the policy making process was now conducted at inter-party conferences (often including key opposition parties).

Because of this post-electoral dynamic, the presidents that governed Bolivia between 1985 and 2002 resembled the kind of multi-party coalitions typical of parliamentary democracies. As in parliamentary democracies, the selection of the chief executive involved substantial inter-party negotiations. Yet these "parliamentarized" executives were still "presidential" executives. Presidents were expected to serve their full terms, there was no expectation that the legislature could call for a vote of confidence or that the president could dissolve the legislature, and the constitutional line of succession was acknowledged. Certainly, none of the six presidents that governed Bolivia between 1985 and 2002 thought of themselves as a prime minister.

This system, of course, came under increasing pressure after 2000. In part, this was due to some unexpected consequences of institutional reforms. While Participación Popular and the adoption of an MMP electoral system helped improve vertical accountability and opened up new spaces for political participation at the local level, it also introduced new

“centrifugal” tendencies into the political process. Both reforms introduced new incentives for regional, local, and sectoral elites to seek political power outside the traditional party system (Centellas 2005). In particular, it provided new institutional spaces for “anti-systemic” political forces that opposed the existing neoliberal consensus among the traditional (or “systemic” parties). This contributed to an erosion of support for traditional parties, which in turn contributed to a broader crisis of legitimacy. Both Participación Popular and the new MMP electoral system—under which approximately half of the legislature was elected by plurality in single-member “uninominal” districts—made it possible for political “outsiders” to bypass the traditional parties and gain power directly.

In 2003, Bolivia’s parliamentarized presidentialism broke down in the face of an intense social and political crisis (though this should not be confused with a complete breakdown of democracy). Thus, the second Sánchez de Lozada presidency (2002–2003) illustrates the Achilles heel of parliamentarized presidentialism. On the one hand, the weakness of the regime had much to do with poor choices made by political elites. Despite growing unrest, much of their time was spent squabbling over the distribution of cabinet seats and other government patronage. Locked into the logic of coalition building, Bolivia’s political class fiddled while La Paz burned. But on the other hand, the regime also suffered from a critical institutional weakness: it lacked a safety valve. Without a constitutional exit strategy, political elites found themselves unable to swiftly defuse or resolve any crisis. We will return to my preferred institutional solution—a constructive vote of confidence—later. But it is clear that, since October 2003, Bolivia has not experienced “parliamentarized” presidentialism, but rather “pure” presidentialism.

Carlos Mesa and Evo Morales in Comparative Perspective

This paper focuses on the presidencies of Carlos Mesa and Evo Morales and considers them as two examples of “pure” presidential executives. Unlike previous “parliamentarized” chief executives, neither was elected by a multiparty legislative coalition. Although the relevant constitutional provision (Article 90) for the selection of the president by congressional election remained in place in 2005, it was not exercised in the case of Morales. Similarly, while Mesa was technically “elected” (as Sánchez de Lozada’s vice presidential running mate), he had by early October 2003 distanced himself from the governing legislative coalition and deliberately declared himself an “independent,” stressing that he had never been a member of any political party.¹¹ Thus, this paper argues that both Mesa and Morales operated within (and also partly shaped) a *different* political institutional context than did previous chief executives.¹²

Mesa’s presidency does not fit the model of “parliamentarized” presidentialism. Unlike previous presidents—including Jorge Quiroga, who assumed the presidency in 2001 after Banzer resigned (for health reasons)—Mesa governed without a legislative coalition. Because of his

insistence throughout 2003–2005 to govern independently from political parties—particularly by naming a cabinet of “independent” figures—Mesa deliberately and consistently distanced himself both from political parties and the legislature. In contrast, Quiroga inherited both the presidency and the multiparty coalition (one he himself had been instrumental in creating) that sustained it. Additionally, unlike Mesa, Quiroga made few references to his personal popularity, did not seek to mobilize popular support on his behalf, and instead staked his presidency primarily on traditional representative institutions. Thus, Mesa, unlike Quiroga, did not represent a continuation of his predecessor’s coalition government; rather, he signals a break.

The case of Carlos Mesa is an interesting juxtaposition to that of Quiroga. Although Mesa, like Quiroga, was a sitting vice president, the two were in many ways dissimilar. While Quiroga had been active in party politics since the late 1980s, Mesa had no such trajectory. Despite being a well-known public figure in his own right (as a television news anchor and political commentator, as well as for his academic credentials as a historian), Mesa was an “apolitical” figure. This, of course, was part of what made him an attractive running mate for Sánchez de Lozada: Mesa could bring middle class voters who were also disaffected by traditional politicians and projected a sense of honesty, intellectualism, and independence to the campaign. As a president, however, this meant that Mesa lacked long-established ties to any political party or organization.¹³

Quiroga often clashed with members of his own party (ADN, Democratic National Action), antagonized several of his government’s coalition partners, and sought extra-institutional sources of legitimacy (such as the “National Dialogue” initiative). But these similarities should be put into proper context. While Quiroga clashed with other ADN leaders—after all, he represented a different, “technocratic” generational movement within the party—his membership in the party was never suspect.¹⁴ The tensions between members of the ADN-led coalition (which eventually led to the coalition’s breakup) can also be understood in the context of electoral politics: Historically, multiparty coalitional pacts broke up in the months preceding a new election. Finally, while Quiroga’s “National Dialogue” model (which sought to bring government and social movements together to discuss various social and economic issues) was both participatory and extra-institutional, it is substantially different from the mass mobilization model Mesa and Morales would later employ.

The Morales presidency also does not fit the model of “parliamentarized” presidentialism. Instead, it reflects a different kind of chief executive: a president with strong legislative and mass support. The Morales government also stands out as the first single-party government since the 1952–1964 MNR hegemony.¹⁵ This, of course, means that president Morales has much firmer standing vis-à-vis the legislature than Mesa did. Thus, understanding the Morales presidency is crucial to understanding

the fuzzy boundary between “parliamentarized” and “pure” presidentialism in Bolivia.

Because of the different origins of their presidencies, one should expect their presidential “tone” (or behavior) to have been different. Mesa was in many ways a “weak” president: he lacked a legislative coalition or any other institutionalized organizational base of support and assumed the office at a time of great political turmoil. In the end, he was driven from office after eighteen months under circumstances similar to Sánchez de Lozada. In contrast, Morales was directly elected by popular vote and brought with him a majority in the House of Deputies and a near-majority in the Senate. Yet both presidents staked their authority outside of a multi-party legislative coalition (Mesa because of constitutional succession and Morales because of his direct election), making them both “pure” (rather than “parliamentarized”) presidential executives.

Mesa and “Pure” Presidentialism after October 2003

The presidency of Carlos Mesa marked a transition to a more traditional form of presidential politics. Between October 2003 and June 2005 Carlos Mesa governed Bolivia without a congressional majority. The MNR, under whose banner he had been elected vice president, resented the former media personality and political independent as an opportunist; meanwhile, the parties in the anti-systemic opposition (MAS and Pachakuti Indigenous Movement [MIP]) were equally unwilling to formally support him. Additionally, although Mesa began his presidency announcing that his would be a transitional period before early elections, by January 2004 he had declared his intention to finish Sánchez de Lozada’s term in office (scheduled to end August 2007)—extending his own previously self-declared mandate. In the final analysis, Mesa, acted like the typical independent Latin American “outsider” president, relying primarily on his personal charisma and reputation as a public intellectual to govern Bolivia.

Mesa frequently referenced his popularity ratings in public opinion polls in confrontations with the legislature or other oppositional groups. In particular, he played a game of brinksmanship with the legislature, threatening several times to resign.¹⁶ During such maneuvers, he clearly emphasized his popularity and juxtaposed it with public discontent with the legislature’s performance. Despite his long-standing reputation as a member of the La Paz *criollo* (Spanish-descended) social elite and intelligentsia, Mesa attempted to create a new public persona as a man of the people and an “outsider.” He would frequently appear on the balcony of the Palacio Quemado (the presidential palace) or in indigenous garb in visits to the Altiplano, in both cases to address popular audiences. In addition, Mesa became the first president since democratization to make the territorial dispute with Chile a central part of his presidency.¹⁷ Overall, Mesa promoted a new national-populist persona, using the La Paz-El Alto “street” as his base of support against the traditional political establishment. Mesa sought to portray himself as “above both political

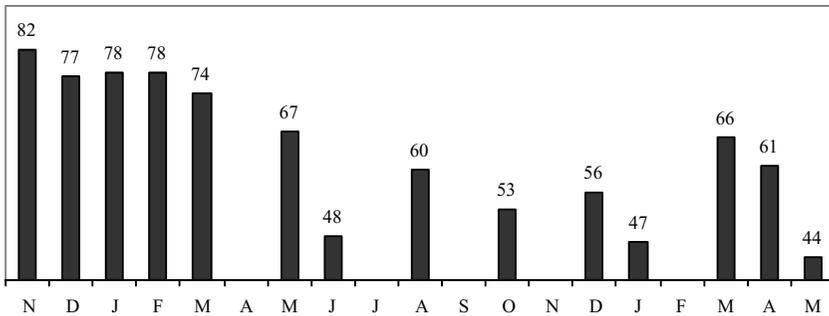
parties and organized interests" (O'Donnell 1994, 60) to build a "quasi-personal relationship with a large base of followers, bypassing established intermediary organizations" (Weyland 1995, 128). Lacking links to an institutional base of support (whether in a political party or a social movement), Mesa attempted to link himself directly to "the people."

One such example is his presidential address of March 15, 2005. In it, Mesa called for early elections (something he had promised in October 2003, then recanted in January 2004) and threatened to resign. In doing so, however, he appealed directly to the audience (the speech was televised) with patriotic historicist appeals, he expressed his personal frustration at the inability of the legislature to move forward, and he specifically mentioned his high poll figures. For several minutes, he broke down the figures by city, contrasting them to his previous month's polls. His conclusion: as a president with nearly 70 percent of popular support who was being "blocked" by a legislature with little popular support, he was (like his supporters) a victim. In short, Mesa portrayed himself as a direct agent of the people who was blocked at every turn by an oppositional "politicized" legislature. Most telling, perhaps, is that months later, the new edition of his own *magnum opus* on the Bolivian presidency, he spends considerable time defending his presidency, again citing his standing in public opinion polls (Mesa 2006, 30–33). This was shortly followed by a lengthy memoir in which he gives a historian's defense of his own presidency (Mesa 2008).

Even the 2004 gas referendum, which he organized, had elements of populist demagoguery. There was little pretence that the referendum was not essentially a plebiscite on his administration, for which he was criticized.¹⁸ The confusing and oddly phrased referendum questions were secretly and carefully drawn up within the executive branch (rather than by the legislature or through public consultation) and were expressly designed to ratify Mesa's public hydrocarbons policy. Despite the more "participative" process that referendum democracy (only recently introduced in the 2004 constitutional reforms) promised, it was clear that the procedure could be easily abused.¹⁹ Mesa, with the full resources of the government, campaigned for the "Sí" vote to win across all five questions. Because this was his preferred policy, the referendum became less a way to measure public sentiment for or against different kinds of policies (voters could only accept or reject Mesa's policy), but rather as a way to force legislators to adopt a policy that Mesa had earlier demanded of them.

What is remarkable is that Mesa, a well respected intellectual and self-described "progressive," could not resist what I call the "populist temptation." While I do not suggest that Mesa was merely a soft-spoken tyrant, he clearly demonstrated a strong degree of demagoguery. Bolivia's first experience with a "pure" president was not encouraging. Even a well-intentioned self-described progressive like Mesa was too easily tempted to rely principally on personal charisma, populist appeals, and a carefully crafted "outsider" status. A look at Figure 1 reveals that Mesa was, indeed, highly popular (certainly relative to previous presidents) for most of his

Figure 1. Approval ratings for Carlos Mesa, October 2003 to May 2005



Data from *Angus Reid Global Monitor* (<http://angus-reid.com>); opinion poll data for some months is not available.

presidency. But this popularity, on which he pinned his regime's legitimacy, fluctuated over time. Not surprisingly, his popularity hit its lowest mark the month before the legislature finally accepted his resignation (this was his third offer of resignation of the year) on 6 June 2005. In the end, like other populist "outsider" presidents, Mesa's reliance on public opinion left him vulnerable the moment this support faded.

Mesa's resignation sparked a brief constitutional crisis.²⁰ In the end, a compromise in Congress bypassed the constitutional line of succession and appointed Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé (head of the Supreme Court) as the new president. Rodríguez would only hold the presidency for seven months, just enough time to organize and oversee the December 2005 presidential elections (originally slated for August, but frequently pushed back).

Rodríguez was little more than a caretaker president. Yet his administration demonstrates the weakness of a "pure" presidential system for a case like Bolivia. Had the legislature had the opportunity to call early elections on its own, without resorting to playing a game of "chicken" with Mesa, perhaps elections could have been held as early as 2004 (after all, the referendum on the gas issue was held in July of that year). By mid-2005, however, the political situation had deteriorated to such a state that elections were the only viable exit strategy. Had the legislature employed this option sooner, could the crisis have been averted (or at least better managed)? Or was the situation after October 2003 so volatile that early elections would have only made things worse? There is no clear answer (though the December 2004 municipal elections suggest that early elections were possible). It is clear, however, that in the absence of elections, the temporal rigidity of a "pure" presidential administration nearly brought Bolivia to the breaking point. The Bolivian crisis hit a critical point under Mesa, as political leaders and social movements based in the so-called *media luna* (the eastern lowland and hydrocarbons-rich regions

of Bolivia) were particularly active—and at some points, the threat of secession became a possible (if not probable) reality.²¹ Between January and June of 2005 the country was regularly paralyzed by frequent strikes and road blockades.

The December 2005 presidential election opened yet another chapter in contemporary Bolivian politics. With 53.7 percent of the national vote, Morales became the first candidate to win election to the presidency directly by popular vote since 1964—and the first in a fully competitive election. Because of Bolivia's fused-ballot electoral system, this also translated into a (relative) majority for MAS. Of course, Morales (who is not very popular in the *media luna*) was not able to carry enough departments to win a majority of the Senate. In the upper legislative chamber, it was Quiroga's Democratic and Social Power (PODEMOS) alliance that held a plurality, though it, too, was short of a majority (the MNR and a new party, National Unity [UN], each won a single Senate seat).

Evo's Presidency: An Early Assessment

It is still premature to give more than a brief, cursory evaluation of Morales's presidency. While his administration has done much in a short time—particularly moving quickly to announce the nationalization of the hydrocarbons industry (its implementation, of course, is another matter) and calling a constituent assembly election in July 2006—we do not yet have the full benefit of hindsight. Still, enough time has passed (nearly three years as of this writing) that a reserved analysis is possible. Interestingly, the Morales's presidency resembles Mesa's in style—though it deviates in key areas. Like Mesa, Morales relies heavily on populist appeals and attempts to control his public persona in the media. Unlike Mesa, however, Morales has a history of direct political involvement—both as a *cocalero* syndicalist organizer and as a political activist in the marginal Bolivian left going back to the early 1980s.²² This difference is often underplayed, but it means that Morales is not as much of a political “outsider” as he is often portrayed to be (though he was clearly not an “insider” before his election, either).

Morales represents a sector of the Bolivian population (rural, poor, indigenous) that has been underrepresented, marginalized, and otherwise disadvantaged for much of the country's history. Despite numerous gains, such as Participación Popular and the election of Víctor Hugo Cárdenas (Sanchez de Lozada's running mate in 1993) as the first indigenous vice president, conditions for Bolivia's rural, poor, and mostly-indigenous population continues to have only marginally improved; meanwhile, urban poverty has actually increased.²³ Yet Morales is not a complete political “outsider.” As a key player in the Bolivian syndicalism movement of the 1980s and 1990s, Morales was certainly well known. With the resources made available to local governments under Participación Popular, MAS (which controlled most of the municipal governments in the tropical Cochabamba valleys) can hardly claim to lack access to the economic,

political, or social resources of the state. Likewise, Morales's election to the House of Deputies in 1997 (under the United Left [IU] banner) and 2002 (when he led MAS to a surprise second place finish in the presidential race), Morales was a fixture in Bolivian political life (unlike Fujimori in 1990). What Morales was not, of course, was a representative of the traditional political elite. He has frequently exploited the symbolic value of this position to his benefit, such as with his January 2006 "indigenous" inaugural ceremony in Tiwanaku.

It is also important to note that Morales is not merely another Alberto Fujimori or Hugo Chávez. Unlike Fujimori, Morales demonstrates an interest in building political organizations—both in strengthening MAS and its allied *sindicatos* (unions). Unlike Chávez, Morales does not have a firm control over the armed forces and has not (yet) strayed too far from constitutional provisions. Like both Fujimori and Chávez before him, Morales recently oversaw the drafting of a new constitution. But unlike in Fujimori's Peru or Chávez's Venezuela, Bolivia's Constituent Assembly was elected in a free and fair election in which opposition parties won a considerable number of seats. Since a new constitution required a two-thirds supermajority, this soon became a contentious issue.²⁴

In the face of entrenched opposition, Morales followed the example of other delegative presidents like Fujimori or Chavez, who also sought to push through new constitutions. At times, even his own party's delegates demonstrated independence, insisting that the new constitution should be "deliberated" rather than "dictated." But as the constituent assembly became mired in its deliberations in Sucre after a year, Morales sought to wrestle control over the assembly's direction. Clashes between government and opposition forces in Sucre (which left three dead) in November 2007 ended poorly, as the assembly (without opposition members) barricaded themselves in a military base outside the city to hastily approved a draft constitution.²⁵ Days later, on December 8-9, 2007, 165 of the 255 assembly delegates reconvened in Oruro and approved a final draft of the constitution. Since then, government and opposition forces have been locked in heated conflict—particularly over the issue of regional autonomy.

Interestingly, however, Morales also faces new institutional checks that no previous president has faced. Constitutionally, the president is empowered to appoint new prefects to the country's nine departments. But as part of a compromise with *media luna* social movements, the December 2005 elections included prefect elections (the country's first). Opposition candidates won six of these races, including the three most populous and wealthiest departments: Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, and La Paz. Theoretically, of course, Morales can dismiss prefects and name their replacements. It is thus rather surprising that, given the level of tension between him and opposition prefects, he has not chosen to exercise this option. Additionally, after events in the city of Sucre led to the MAS prefect's resignation, the Morales government called for new special election and installed a new,

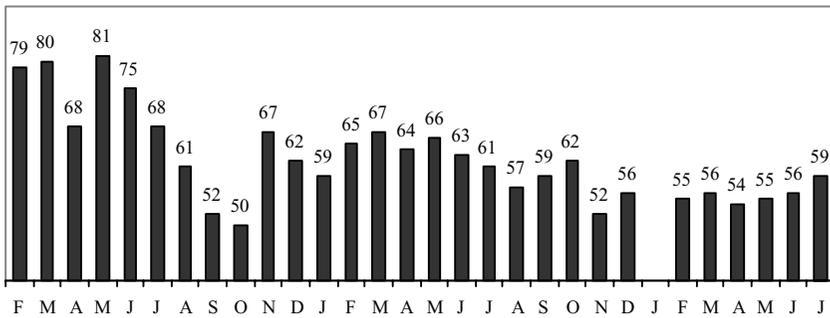
popularly elected Chuquisaca prefect—even though voters there narrowly elected an opposition candidate.

This is not to say that Morales has not been susceptible to the populist or delegative temptation of presidential power. In his rhetoric, Morales (and his vice president, Alvaro García Linera) frequently demonstrate a preference for a majoritarian conception of democracy. Ironically, this is different from the conception MAS espoused when it was in the opposition. Similarly, Morales has been known to move the goal posts. In anticipation of the June 2006 constituent assembly election, Morales announced that his party would win the necessary two-thirds supermajority of seats as required by a law his own government passed; when this was not the case, he declared that the Assembly should make decisions by simple majority. Similarly, the June 2006 autonomy referendum election was declared to be “binding” for those departments where “Sí” (in favour of autonomy) was successful; after “Sí” won in all four of the *media luna* departments, Morales announced that the referendum was only a “consultative” frame of reference for the Assembly. Other alarming moves include the recent Ponchos Rojos controversy: Morales and García Linera both attended an event in Omasuyos (a province near Lake Titicaca) that seemed to endorse an indigenous paramilitary force.²⁶ Yet another example includes recent social unrest in Cochabamba, in which Morales supporters tried in January 2007 to remove the Cochabamba prefect (Manfred Reyes Villa), a key opposition figure.²⁷

In the end, however, Reyes Villa was removed by voters, not by Morales. As tensions escalated through mid 2008, opposition legislators hastily approved a recall referendum earlier suggested by Morales. The vote would apply to Morales, García Linera, and eight of the nine prefects (Chuquisaca was excluded, since it had only recently elected a new prefect). Again, there were conflicts over the threshold necessary to remove incumbents and there was uncertainty about how government and opposition would interpret the results. In the end, the vote merely reinforced the existing stalemate and increased polarization. Morales (and García Linera) were backed by more than two thirds of voters, as was Ruben Costas, the Santa Cruz prefect and key opposition figure. Incumbents won back their seats in all but two departments: La Paz and Cochabamba. Soon after the election, Morales announced that voters would choose new prefects.

Perhaps Morales will yet become more authoritarian, following the examples of Fujimori or Chávez. But that time has not yet come, despite some troubling signs. In part, the climate is so polarized in contemporary Bolivia that it is difficult to assess the true nature of the regime. And Morales supporters are not the only ones willing to mobilize and use intimidation as a political weapon. While it was Morales supporters who initiated the January Cochabamba unrest (and it is important to note that Morales and other MAS figures openly endorsed the removal of Reyes Villa and other opposition prefects), it was Reyes Villa supporters who initiated the violence. And although the *katarista* (a militant Aymara indigenist



Figure 2. Approval ratings for Evo Morales, February 2006 to July 2008

Data from *Angus Reid Global Monitor* (<http://angus-reid.com>).

movement that emerged in the 1970s) *Ponchos Rojos* are troubling, so are the *Unión Juvenil Cruceñista* and the *Nación Camba* (two regionalist groups active in the *media luna*). Most telling, however, is that in both cases Morales could have taken a more radical line. Morales did not have to encourage his supporters to protest against Reyes Villa; he could have just sacked him. And if Morales was truly interested in arming a paramilitary force, then why did he order the disarmament of the *Ponchos Rojos* only a day after the press ran the story? Surely Morales has displayed some troubling populist or delegative tendencies; but he has not yet shown himself to be a fully authoritarian figure.

Like Mesa, the strength of Morales's presidential power has seen its rise and fall in popular opinion polls (see Figure 2); he has been most effective when his popularity has been high and less effective when it is low. Unlike the pre-2003 regimes, which rarely reached 40 percent or better in job approval polls, popular majorities have regularly supported both Morales and Mesa. It is thus surprising that previous presidents had been able to govern in relative calm and political stability between 1985 and 2002. Despite the occasional social protest or manifestation, Bolivian governments remained remarkably stable. I argue that the reason for this is that such presidents were "parliamentarized"—their primary reference point was not popular opinion, but the legislature. While no government is perfectly insulated from popular opinion, Bolivia's presidential democracy remained stable because of the legislative majority coalitions that served as their foundations. But Morales, who did not rely on a multiparty legislative coalition, was instead tempted to base his legitimacy not on his party's legislative majority, but on his personal popularity. Morales's presidential style has distanced him from the legislature. This has brought him increasingly into conflict with legislators from his own party, who chafe at the idea of being "led" rather than "consulted" by their elected chief of state—particularly as more key policy decisions are made by executive decree, rather than the legislature.



It is in this context that Morales has advocated a constitutional stipulation that will allow him to run for reelection. Such a move is problematic, not only because it too closely resembles similar previous moves by Fujimori, Menem, and Chávez, but because it signals a distrust of his own political party. If Morales is concerned with building a lasting and institutionalized political organization, then MAS must be more than a personal vehicle for his own ambitions. And yet Morales has distanced himself from many previous allies (such as Alejo Véliz, with whom he co-founded the Assembly for Popular Sovereignty and the parallel Political Instrument for Popular Sovereignty [ASP-IPSP], and Filemon Escobar, his former chief advisor and a MAS Senator from 2002–2005). Additionally, a future Morales reelection campaign suggests either that there is no internal successor to Morales or that there is no “institutional space” for internal MAS figures to challenge Morales—or, worse, both of these options. This will be the true test of MAS as a political movement. Just as the test of the MNR has been to survive Paz Estenssoro and Sánchez de Lozada (a test the MNR barely passed), MAS will have to demonstrate that it represents a constituency, and not merely the personal ambitions of Evo Morales.

The Future of Presidentialism in Bolivia?

Here, let us briefly address the future of Bolivia’s presidential system. The new proposed constitution would introduce a second round runoff or two-round system (TRS) presidential electoral system, as well as immediate reelection of the chief executive. Already, Evo Morales has made clear that he wishes to run for reelection under the new constitution. Such moves suggest that Bolivia could be headed closer to the model of other delegative democrats (such as Chávez, Fujimori, or Menem) who have sought to extend their presidential mandates beyond existing constitutional provisions.

A brief comparative look at Ecuador and Peru suggests that such a move is potentially dangerous for liberal democracy. In both Ecuador and Peru, presidents are elected by direct popular vote and presidential and legislative ballots are not linked. In both cases, the legislature is separately elected using a list-PR electoral formula while the chief executive is elected using TRS. The consequences for both countries have been relatively similar and consistent with the predictions made by Linz and others. The Peruvian case is most familiar and most extreme: after the collapse of the party system in the late 1980s, a political outsider (Fujimori) was elected in the runoff election. Despite winning with 56.5 percent of the popular vote, Fujimori’s electoral vehicle (Cambio 90) won only 18.3 percent of the lower house and 23.3 of the upper chamber. Facing stiff congressional opposition, Fujimori opted for an *autogolpe* (“self-coup”).

While not as drastic, the Ecuadorian pattern has been similarly problematic. A number of social uprisings and military interventions drive home the point that Ecuador’s democracy has at best only “muddled

through” since the 1980s. In large measure, this is attributed to the weakness of Ecuadorian presidents, who regularly lack legislative majorities (Conaghan 1994; Barczak 2001). The result has been a series of confrontations between executives and legislatures, a propensity for presidents to appeal directly to the people and govern “over” the legislature, and other measures consistent with the Linzian view of presidentialism. If Peru and Ecuador are indications of what a Bolivia with a TRS presidential electoral system would look like, the future is not promising.

But one should not simply retain the status quo because the available options are bleak. Article 90 of the Bolivian constitution is a useful measure, not only for Bolivia, but perhaps also for other struggling presidential systems. Many presidential systems coexist with list-PR electoral systems—exactly what Linz and others suggest is the most dangerous combination. But since list-PR electoral systems have their advantages (particularly in terms of representativeness) and since societies with multiparty systems infrequently transition into societies with two-party systems, this combination of list-PR presidentialism is likely to remain. Parliamentarized presidentialism offers an appealing alternative for moderate reform. This would require, of course, that presidential votes and list-PR votes be fused—as they are in the Bolivian case.

The real issue is to provide reforms that encourage *horizontal* accountability, rather than emphasizing *vertical* accountability (O’Donnell 1998).²⁸ A TRS electoral system perhaps more closely ties presidential winners to popular mandates, but such mandates can be fleeting. More importantly, in the absence of strong institutions (such as capable legislatures and institutionalized political parties) that hold presidents accountable to the rule of law and liberal democratic norms, presidential elections may become little more than plebiscitary exercises. What parliamentarized presidentialism offers is a way to more closely bind executives and legislatures into mutually dependent relationships, which (one hopes) will foster greater horizontal accountability between the two branches of government. One must remember that, ultimately, seats in both the Senate and the House of Deputies are determined by the “plurinominal” (presidential) portion of the ballot. Since the Bolivian president—under pre-2003 “normal” circumstances—was not elected directly by voters, but rather by the legislature (under the Article 90 provision), the problem of “dual legitimacy” is significantly reduced.

What is crucial is to seek constitutional means to pre-emptively diffuse the kind of political crisis that Bolivia faced between 2003 and 2005. One possibility is to adopt constitutional provisions for a constructive vote of confidence. Though not yet exercised, this is a constitutional procedure available in Botswana, where presidents are also elected by parliament, rather than directly by voters. Precedents for this provision already exist in Bolivia, as well. At the municipal government level, the constructive vote of confidence has been used in Bolivia, even if with mixed results. At the national level, one could describe the naming of Rodríguez as a



“constructive vote of confidence,” since Congress suspended the legal procedure, which was to appoint the Senate president (the next in the line of succession after the vice president).

Unlike impeachments, confidence votes are less “costly” and less likely to polarize the electorate. A constructive vote of confidence would allow for highly unpopular, ineffective, or even corrupt or incompetent presidents to be easily removed from office without requiring proof of “guilt” or wrongdoing, which would of course be heavily resisted by any incumbent president. And in cases where the legislature wishes to remove the president, but does not want to invest the vice president (or any other figure in the line of succession), the option to allow the Congress to name a suitable interim president seems reasonable. After all, representative electoral democracy rests authority not only in chief executives, but also in legislatures. As elected popular representatives, one should expect that legislators are collectively both capable and responsive.

There may be situations in which snap elections are not a viable solution. More importantly, presidents have a demonstrated tendency to want to remain in power. Hernán Siles Zuazo showed remarkable character in 1984 when he declared that he would step down from the presidency ahead of schedule and called for early elections. But not every president is a Siles Zuazo. One wonders how the 2003-2005 crisis might have been differently handled if Congress had been able to remove Mesa and name an interim successor earlier. Though Congress eventually did just that, it was only in a *reactive* capacity (Mesa initiated his own resignation), not a *proactive* capacity. And if Bolivia’s Congress has the power to install a president, I see little reason why it should not also have to power to remove one.

Conclusion

Both Mesa and Morales, despite their differences, share several similarities that mark them apart from Bolivia’s previously “parliamentarized” presidents. Both increasingly relied on a populist-nationalist rhetoric that, though different in specific content, was similar in tone. Beyond this, both eschewed formal democratic institutions—specifically political parties and the legislature. Mesa assumed the presidency in October 2003 as an “independent.” And while he might have sought to build an institutional base of support by reaching out to MBL or even MAS, he instead sought to base his presidency directly on public opinion. In a similar vein, Morales has regularly sidelined his legislative bloc, arguing instead that his presidency was based on the “social movements” (*bases sociales*). Finally, both have attempted at least one significant international public relations push: Mesa with his campaign in the United Nations for sovereign access to the sea; Morales with his international Nobel Prize bid, *Daily Show* appearance, and whirlwind pre-inaugural world tour. Such tendencies are markedly different from those of previous presidents.

Because of their institutional isolation, both presidents also relied heavily on personally concentrated power, particularly with the use of decree

powers. Mesa, of course, had little choice since he was cut off from the legislature. Yet it is surprising that Morales turned so frequently to the use of decree powers, since he had control of the legislature.²⁹ Many members of his own party were surprised when, on May 1, 2006, Morales announced the nationalization of the gas industry. In previous administrations, it was common for policy to be decided through a multiparty cabinet. Thus, “presidential” power was frequently dispersed among ministers, with presidents acting like prime ministers.

These changes in presidential behavior since 2003 bring Bolivia closer into alignment with the expectations of the Linzian critique of presidentialism and the perceived tendency to produce “delegative democrats.” Since 2003, two very different personalities have nevertheless governed with a similar—and very “presidential”—style of politics. Both Mesa and Morales emphasized their personal abilities and gave greater weight to public opinion than to institutions. Whenever necessary or convenient, both also directly attacked the legislature, demonstrating a preference for “presidential” public legitimacy over that of other elected representatives. It is interesting that both presidents believed themselves to hold a superior “mandate” directly from the people. While Morales’s claim is more credible (he won an election and survived a recall vote), Mesa claimed that he had “received” a mandate from the people to fulfill the “October agenda.” Finally, Morales’s efforts to include reelection in the new constitution is consistent with efforts by other “delegative” presidents to extend the length of their mandates.

In conclusion, while it is important not to overlook the differences between Morales and Mesa, it is also important to see how their similarities mark an institutional change in Bolivian presidential politics. With the increasing polarization around two parties, MAS and PODEMOS, it is unlikely that Bolivia’s political system revert to the more centripetal form of multiparty politics that parliamentarized presidentialism requires. Additionally, Bolivia’s presidential democracy seems likely to experience the same kind of pattern found throughout South America—and particularly the Andes. If so, the prospects for Bolivia’s democratic stability are not very promising. Where once Bolivia was “exceptional,” it now seems more likely to resemble Peru or Ecuador, two presidential democracies with a history of political problems. One of the many tasks for Bolivia’s Constituent Assembly was to seek institutional guarantees to strengthen democratic institutions other than the presidency. This, unfortunately, proved to be a daunting task.

Notes

¹ A complete text of the constitution approved by the constituent assembly is available online (<http://www.constituyente.bo>).

² Though this was a key plank in the 2005 MAS platform (available online at <http://www.masbolivia.org/mas/gobierno/pactp.html>), proposals for a runoff system go back to the early 1990s. During multiparty

negotiations for a new electoral law (which eventually produced the German-influenced mixed-member proportional system), ADN and MIR advocated that presidents should be elected by simple plurality, while the MNR advocated a runoff system. In the end, neither proposal was adopted, leaving parliamentary election of the executive the default compromise choice, though it was modified to limit parliament to vote between the two candidates with the most popular votes.

³ For a recent criticism of this view, see Cheibub (2007). While Cheibub is correct to point out that presidential democracies are also likely to produce multiparty governments, he focuses too heavily on the formation of governments. A key problem with presidentialism is its inflexibility in the face of crisis—its inability to easily *remove* executives (an inflexibility that does not exist in parliamentary democracies). It is this inflexibility that contributes to the high number of “interrupted” presidencies in Latin America.

⁴ Weyland (1995) himself makes this connection.

⁵ Paz Estenssoro was a founding member of the MNR and the party’s great *caudillo*. Siles Zuazo (another MNR founder) had planned and led the 1952 uprising and was president from 1956–1960; he later split to form his own “Left” MNR (MNRI). Banzer was dictator from 1972–1978 and later formed his own party (ADN).

⁶ For discussions of the relationship between democracy and populism, see Panizza (2005, in particular the chapters by Francisco Panizza, Ernesto Laclau, and Benjamin Arditi).

⁷ I do not dispute, of course, that Bolivia had many social, economic, and political problems during this period. I only mean that these did not result in a *constitutional* crisis. Between 1985 and 2002, there were no military coups, no president was forced to resign by popular demonstrations, elections went as planned, incumbent presidents did not attempt to change institutional rules to allow their immediate reelection, and the constitutional separation of power was respected. This may set the bar low, but it is a minimal standard that many Latin American countries have been unable to meet.

⁸ Others have referred to this system by other names. Gamarra (1997) calls it “hybrid” presidentialism; Shugart and Carey (1992) call it “assembly-independent” presidentialism.

⁹ Chile had a similar constitutional provision from 1925 to 1973, though by tradition the Chilean legislature always selected the plurality winner. This was not the case in Bolivia, where second and third place candidates were chosen. However, under Bolivia’s Article 90, if Congress is unable to agree on a candidate after three rounds of voting, the plurality winner is declared president.

¹⁰ By itself, the MNR (which included a pre-electoral alliance with the indigenous Revolutionary Tupaj Katari Liberation Movement [MRTKL]) won 40 percent of the House of Deputies (52 of 130 seats) and 63 percent of the Senate (17 of 27 seats).

¹¹ Mesa had been specifically invited to join the 2002 MNR-MBL presidential ticket because of his “outsider” status as a respected public intellectual and news commentator.

¹² In contrast to a more “static” institutionalism, I subscribe to the “new” institutionalism, which considers both *formal* and *informal* rules, procedures, and predictable norms of behavior. See Peters (1996).

¹³ Mesa’s sympathies toward the small social-democratic Free Bolivia Movement (MBL) and Juan Del Granado’s Movement Without Fear (MSM) were known, but he had never formally joined either party.

¹⁴ Additionally, the inter-party conflicts were partly the product of electoral realities. As Banzer’s 1997 running mate, Quiroga was expected to become the ADN standard-bearer in the 2002 presidential election. Because sitting presidents are constitutionally barred from running for reelection (in the current constitution), Banzer’s resignation and Quiroga’s ascension to the presidency in 2001 initiated a bitter internal party struggle.

¹⁵ Though it is important to note that MAS retains loose alliances with a number of smaller political parties, particularly MBL and MSM.

¹⁶ The resignation threats were particularly effective because of the constitutional lines of succession. Following Mesa in the line were Hormando Vaca Diez (a senator from Santa Cruz for MIR who was president of the Senate) and Mario Cossío (a deputy from Tarija for the MNR who was president of the House of Deputies). Both were particularly unpopular among the residents of La Paz and El Alto; they also represented rival legislative blocs.

¹⁷ Bolivia has a longstanding territorial dispute with Chile stemming the 1879-1883 War of the Pacific. While it has been Bolivian foreign policy to pressure Chile for access to the sea since 1978, Mesa was the first in recent history to specifically mobilize civil society in the effort. This included a massive letter writing campaign by school children and encouraging protests at Chilean embassies and consulates around the world.

¹⁸ By some accounts, Mesa was merely fulfilling an earlier promise (made by Sánchez de Lozada) to appease demands for a referendum on the gas issue. Yet the referendum became a vehicle through which Mesa could mobilize public support behind his presidency and against the legislature. Additionally, numerous social movement leaders who participated in the *guerra del gas* (especially indigenous leader Felipe Quispe and labor leader Jaime Solares) actively campaigned against the referendum and called for a boycott because Mesa refused to explicitly include the issue of gas nationalization. Mesa’s government responded by calling calls for a boycott “unpatriotic” and “destabilizing”—and called for strict enforcement of mandatory voting laws. In the end, the election saw a low voter turnout (around 60 percent) and significantly higher than normal number of spoiled or blank votes, which accounted for between 22 and 27 percent of the total votes across the five questions (referendum questions and results available from National Electoral Court’s website at <http://www.cne.org/bo>). A May 2004 poll by Bolivia’s ERBOL radio

network found that 81 percent of respondents supported nationalization of the gas industry. See "Bolivians Want State-Owned Gas Industry" *Angus Reid Global Monitor* (available online at <http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewItem/itemID/3008>).

¹⁹ For a critical view of Bolivia's referendum reforms, see Breuer (2008).

²⁰ Bolivia's constitution does not allow for the president to name a new vice president. Hence, Mesa's resignation meant that the next persons in line of succession (in order) were: Hormando Vaca Díez, the president of the Senate; Mario Cosío, the president of the House of Deputies; and Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé. The constitutional line of succession did not extend beyond the head of the Supreme Court. Both Vaca Díez (a MIR senator from Santa Cruz) and Cosío (an MNR deputy from Tarija) were controversial choices, and specifically opposed by many of the social movements that had participated in the October 2003 gas war.

²¹ Typically, the references to *media luna* social movements refer to regionalist movements spearheaded by the departmental Civic Committees (such as the Comité Cívico pro Santa Cruz) and the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Services and Tourism (CAINCO). These organizations are primarily middle and upper class in orientation, but they are able to mobilize other sectors as well, primarily through a number of labor and professional unions closely aligned with the regionalist movement. The departments of the so-called *media luna* are: Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, and Tarija. Recent conflicts in Sucre (the capital of Chuquisaca department) in December 2007 have pushed Chuquisaca into this regionalist camp as well.

²² Morales had been active in the various United Left (IU) electoral alliances since the 1980s. In 1995, Morales and Alejo Véliz co-founded the Assembly for the Sovereignty of the People (ASP) and the Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the People (IPSP). Unable to register IPSP in time for the 1999 municipal elections, Morales struck a deal with David Añez Pedraza, the founder of the Unzaguista Movement Towards Socialism (MAS-U), a splinter faction of the Bolivian Falange. In 2002, the party campaigned simply as MAS for the first time in a national election.

²³ According to figures from Bolivia's National Statistics Institute (INE), rural extreme poverty decreased slightly from 59.11 percent in 1999 to 58.62 percent in 2003. Urban extreme poverty has increased in the same time period from 23.63 percent to 29.10 percent. See INE "Bolivia: Indicadores de pobreza extrema por año según área geográfica, 1999–2003" (available online at <http://www.ine.gov.bo>).

²⁴ Constituent Assembly election results made clear that MAS (and its allied parties) would not enjoy the two-thirds supermajority required by law to approve a new constitution. Together, opposition parties won 35.7 percent of the Assembly's seats. Morales and MAS leaders began to insist that the Assembly should be able to approve a new text by simple majority. This precipitated an institutional crisis, as opposition mobilized from August 2006 through February 2007 in defense of the legal

requirement of a two-thirds supermajority (which would have required MAS to compromise with opposition parties).

²⁵ See Andean Information Network, "Bolivia: Three Dead in Capital Conflict" (November 26, 2007).

²⁶ *La Razón*, "El presidente da estatus militar a Ponchos Rojos" (January 24, 2007).

²⁷ *La Razón*, "Un enfrentamiento anunciado entre cochabambinos deja dos muertos" (January 12, 2007).

²⁸ Those who favor "majoritarian" democracy place stronger emphasis on vertical accountability (such as direct elections); those who favor "representative" democracy place greater emphasis on horizontal accountability (such as legislative checks on presidential powers). A preference for horizontal accountability is a normative one, and one this paper will not resolve, though the emphasis on horizontal or "institutionalized" accountability is consistent with O'Donnell, Weyland, Linz, and others.

²⁹ MAS holds a majority of the lower chamber House of Deputies. While it does not hold a majority in the Senate, Morales's government was supported during its first year by an alliance with MNR and UN. Since then, MNR and UN moved into the opposition, giving PODEMOS control of the Senate.

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