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The 2014 presidential and legislative elections in Bolivia

Miguel Centellas

Jackson State University, Jackson, MS, United States

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On October 12, 2014, Bolivia held presidential and legislative elections. This was the second election under the constitution approved in 2009, which expanded the size of the senate, introduced special indigenous seats, and allowed citizens living abroad to vote. This was also the third consecutive time Evo Morales, first elected in the December 2005 election, stood for the presidency. There was some controversy over the legality of Morales's reelection campaign: The constitution stipulates that a president could only serve two consecutive terms, but legal objections were dismissed on April 2013 by the Supreme Constitutional Tribunal. The elections went ahead as scheduled, with Evo Morales and his *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement for Socialism, MAS) party expected to win by a considerable margin.

1. Background

Morales was first elected in 2005 riding popular discontent with the traditional political establishment during the country's worst political crisis since 1982. Morales was also the first president to win directly at the polls, after securing 54% of the popular vote. Prior presidents were elected by parliament under a system of "parliamentarized presidentialism" that produced multiparty coalitions (Mayorga, 1996; Centellas, 2008). Morales's election polarized the country, particularly along the regional divide between the Andean highland and the eastern lowland *media luna* departments that had begun a

drive for regional autonomy a year earlier. This led to the election of a constituent assembly, which deliberated for two full years, culminating in the adoption of a new national constitution in 2009, which devolved significant powers to the country's nine departments and reformed the electoral system.

The 2005 election swept away the party system in place since 1982. Only the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (Nationalist Revolutionary Movement, MNR) contested that election; it won only 6% of the vote, its worst showing ever. But political realignment has been slow. The new party system is marked by a polarization, with MAS facing a fractionalized assortment of establishment politicians and regional political bosses. The main opposition party in 2005, *Poder Democrático y Social* (PODEMOS), won 29% of the vote and control of the Senate, but did not survive beyond its electoral debut. In 2009, a new opposition party, *Plan Progreso para Bolivia–Convergencia Nacional* (PPB–CN), won 27% of the vote, but fared less well under new electoral rules. It too did not survive a second election cycle.

In the decade since Morales came to power, Bolivia saw significant changes. In addition to a new constitution and electoral reforms, the country underwent a second wave of decentralization. Demands for regional (department-level) autonomy, which emerged forcefully in 2004–2005, were incorporated into the new 2009 constitution. Throughout it all, Morales remained both popular and polarizing. Still, the economy has done well in the last several years, primarily thanks to high prices for gas and mineral exports. Prudent spending has left Bolivia with the country's highest ever cash reserves (more than \$14 billion), even as spending for

E-mail address: mcentellas@gmail.com.

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social programs made significant dents in poverty, education, and health indicators. All this bolsters Morales's popularity, which rarely falls below 50%.

2. Electoral system

Bolivia has a presidential system with a bicameral legislature. Formally, the president is elected by simple majority. But the president can be elected by a 40% plurality if he or she has a ten-point lead over the nearest rival. Otherwise, the top two candidates go to a runoff. Presidents are allowed only two consecutive terms (the previous constitution barred reelection). The constitutional court approved Morales's bid for a third consecutive term, arguing that his 2005 election did not count, since it occurred prior to the 2009 constitution.

The 130-member Chamber of Deputies is elected by a mixed-member proportional electoral system using three tiers: 63 seats elected in single-member (uninominal) districts by simple plurality, seven seats elected in special indigenous single-member districts (one in each of the country's nine departments except for Potosí and Chuquisaca), and 60 list (plurinominal) seats elected in nine department-wide districts on closed lists headed by the presidential ticket. The size of uninominal districts is not uniform, resulting in underrepresentation of urban areas. List seats are awarded by d'Hondt formula, after taking into account uninominal (but not special indigenous) seats; in order to produce a proportional outcome, seats won in uninominal districts are subtracted from the total number of seats a party would have been awarded with simple list-PR. The number of list seats in each department range from 13 in La Paz to 1 in Pando. But because list seats are awarded to make department totals reflect the presidential vote, *effective* district magnitudes range from 28 in La Paz to 4 in Pando.¹ There are no overhang seat adjustments.

The Senate is also elected on the basis of the presidential vote. Each department is awarded four seats, awarded by d'Hondt on closed lists. This is the second time this formula was used. Prior to 2009, each department elected three senators (two seats to the first place party, one seat to the runner up).

One significant change to the electoral system is adoption of a gender "parity" law, which requires each party list to include an equal number of male and female candidates, listed in alternating order. The law also requires that in uninominal and special indigenous districts, gender parity be expressed in the naming of titular and *suplente* candidates.² This is a significant change from the 1997 quota law, which only required that every third list candidate be female.

¹ La Paz and Pando actually have 29 and 5 legislative seats, respectively. Because special indigenous seats are not considered when allocating seats by proportionality, the *effective* district magnitude of the seven departments with a special indigenous district is reduced by one.

² In Bolivia's electoral system, each "titular" candidate is accompanied by a "substitute" candidate. In the event that the titular candidate is elected, but is unable to fulfill his or her duties (for any reason), the *suplente* candidate steps in.

The 2009 constitution allows citizens living abroad to vote in presidential elections (although their votes were not used to calculate legislative seats). In 2009, polling stations were set up in Spain, Argentina, Brazil, and the US. In this election, Bolivians could also vote in 33 countries. In some, as few as six people voted (Egypt, Iran, India), but in others the numbers were more substantial. For example, nearly twice as many Bolivians cast ballots in Argentina (73,050) than in Pando, Bolivia's smallest department. Bolivians voting overseas accounted for just over 3% of all ballots cast, up slightly from 2009.

3. Candidates and parties

There was little doubt Morales would seek a third consecutive term, despite the dubious constitutionality.³ Although not a central figure in the protests that toppled Sánchez de Lozada in 2003, Morales (a former coca farmer) made MAS as the principal party for dissatisfied and marginalized Bolivian—particularly those of indigenous descent—by pushing for a new constitution, nationalizing the gas industry, and limiting coca eradication. He also sought to increase his support among the middle-class sectors, by focusing on economic stability and growth coupled with investments in social programs. This "ethnopolitist" strategy (Madrid, 2008) was successful in 2005 and 2009, and was repeated in 2014, when MAS actively recruited several members of the opposition—such as René Joaquino, former presidential candidate and mayor of the city of Potosí removed from office in 2010 under a controversial anti-corruption law—into its candidate lists.

Despite highly public efforts to establish a "unity front," the opposition was again unable to come together behind a single candidate. And, once again, the opposition half of the party system was reorganized. PPB-CN, the electoral vehicle that placed second in the 2005 contest did not survive its electoral debut. Like PODEMOS, PPB-CN was merely an alliance of smaller parties and independent or local opposition figures; like PODEMOS, it failed to become an institutionalized political party. Of the parties that competed in 2009, only *Unidad Nacional* (National Unity, UN) did so again—but it did so as part of a larger electoral alliance, *Unidad Democrática* (Democratic Union, UD), that included the parties of several regional opposition governors, as well as the MNR and other minor parties and organizations.

Morales's principal challenger was Samuel Doria Medina, an entrepreneur recognized as the wealthiest man in Bolivia. Although he never held elective office, Doria Medina was chief economic minister during the Víctor Paz Zamora presidency (1989–1993). Shortly after October 2003, Doria Medina began assembling a new political party he hoped would represent a "third force" alternative to Morales and MAS. In the 2005 and 2009 elections, Doria Medina placed a distant third (with 8% and 6% of the vote).

³ Moreover, as part of a compromise negotiating the 2009 constitution, Morales had agreed to consider his 2005–2010 presidential term his "first," meaning that a victory in 2009 would count as his reelection (Alpert et al., 2010).

However, prior to the 2014 election, Doria Medina forged a coalition with *Movimiento Demócrata Social* (Social Democratic Movement, MDS), a political alliance of opposition governors and mayors; his vice presidential candidate, was Ernesto Suárez, governor of Beni.

The rest of the field included three other candidates. Jorge Quiroga, former president (2001–2002) and second place finisher in the 2005 election, ran as the candidate for the *Partido Demócrata Cristiano* (Christian Democratic Party, PDC). PDC had long been a junior party to Hugo Banzer's conservative ADN, but had not campaigned independently for the presidency since 1985. Juan Del Granado, popular ex-mayor of La Paz, campaigned at the head of his *Movimiento Sin Miedo* (Movement Without Fear, MSM) party. Early on, he was suggested as the standard bearer for a "broad front" opposition coalition. Finally, Fernando Vargas, of the ecological *Partido Verde de Bolivia* (Green Party of Bolivia, PVB), had been a leader in the 2011 indigenous protests against the government's plan to build a highway through the Isiboro Sécore National Park.

4. Campaign

Morales entered August with approval ratings of 80%, according to a *Tal Cual* poll, but that same poll suggested only 49% of Bolivians would vote for Morales for a third term (Telesur, 2014). This gap between Morales's job approval and voter intention polls suggested that Morales was vulnerable to an opposition candidate who could appeal to Morales supporters. His high job approval ratings reflects Bolivia's growing economy: Bolivia is one of the fastest growing economies in South America, with three consecutive years of GDP growth of more than 5%. At the same time, the decade in which Morales has been in office saw significant declines in poverty, illiteracy, and infant mortality.

The Morales campaign emphasized his government's policy successes, asking Bolivians to vote for continuity. Morales argued that only he could guarantee the political stability needed for continued economic growth. After a decade in power, Morales was no longer campaigning as an "outsider" offering sweeping change. And with regional autonomy (the key opposition demand during most of his first presidency) resolved, the opposition lacked a clear rallying issue. As in previous campaigns, Morales refused to participate in presidential candidate debates, preferring instead to rely on the power of the bully pulpit. Morales traveled extensively across the country, presenting government projects, and making extensive use of state media.

Opposition candidates rarely challenged Morales's economic policies, and there was little disagreement regarding major issues, such as decentralization or health and education spending priorities. Instead, opposition proposals could be divided into two categories: those that focused on improving economic and social policies and those that focused on democratic accountability issues. Doria Medina's campaign focused on an economic and social agenda that promised to continue the trajectory of economic growth and socioeconomic development, and warned that Morales's policies were running out of steam. Overall, Doria Medina carefully balanced pointing to his track record as a

consistent opponent of Morales (including an ongoing legal conflict over the expropriation of his cement company, SOBOCE) with projecting an image of someone who built a broad, inclusive coalition.

Quiroga presented himself as the most politically different from Morales. Although many of his economic policies (such as gas industrialization) were similar to the MAS agenda, he emphasized that he would promote trade agreements with all countries, regardless of ideology. Additionally, Quiroga promised to reform the judiciary and curb government abuses of power. During the vice presidential debate, his running mate (Tomas Yarhui) promised to initiate legal proceedings against Morales and other members of his government. Del Granado tried to present himself as a social-democratic alternative to MAS, offering programs like milk subsidies for mothers. The arrest and jailing of one of MSM's senate candidates (Mario Orellana) pushed Del Granado, who first became prominent for his role in prosecuting former dictator Luis García Meza, to go on the attack as well, suggesting that Morales could be tried for abuse of power. Finally, Vargas, the Green Party candidate, was mostly a campaign of "conscience," hoping to increase salience of ecological issues.

During the campaign, there was little change in preference for Morales—but there were shifts within the opposition. IPSOS polls consistently showed Morales winning 59% of the vote from July through October; Mori polls vacillated between 52 and 59%. Doria Medina consistently came in second with 13–18%. The other candidates trailed behind, though support for Quiroga suddenly increased from 4% to 9%. Del Granado was a surprising distant fourth, and his support in the polls steadily decreased from a high of 4% in July. The Green Party candidate, Vargas, barely registered in most polls and at one point considered suspending his campaign. Early in the campaign, polls showed 14–24% of voters were undecided, though in October that number declined to 9%.

5. Results

Turnout was high, with 89% of Bolivian voters casting ballots in 2014, though this was down five points from 2009. The number of registered voters in Bolivia increased by nearly a million new voters to nearly six million. Another nearly 170,000 Bolivians living abroad also voted in the presidential race, up more than 40,000 from 2009.

As expected, Morales and MAS won easily, with 61% of the vote (Table 1), slightly down from 2009 but in line with polling expectations. As in 2009, Morales also won handily in the international voting. Doria Medina was a distant second, but his vote share (24%) was higher than polls predicted. Quiroga placed third with just over 9%. It seems undecided voters shifted towards Doria Medina in the last weeks of the campaign.

There are contradictory signs in the MAS victory. MAS remains the dominant national party. But it did so by mixing gains and losses across the regions. MAS increased its share of the vote in so-called *media luna* departments. But it did so by losing significant ground in Andean strongholds like La Paz, Oruro, and Potosi, where the MAS

Table 1
Results of the 2014 Bolivian presidential election.

	In Bolivia		Outside Bolivia		Overall	
	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%
Evo Morales (MAS)	3,057,618	61.0	115,686	72.3	3,173,304	61.4
Samuel Doria Medina (UN)	1,228,634	24.5	24,654	15.4	1,253,288	24.2
Jorge Quiroga (PDC)	454,233	9.1	13,078	8.2	467,311	9.0
Juan Del Granado (MSM)	135,997	2.7	4288	2.7	140,285	2.7
Fernando Vargas (PVB)	134,906	2.7	2334	1.5	137,240	2.7
Total valid votes (% total votes)	5,011,388	94.2	160,040	95.0	5,171,428	94.2
Null votes (% total votes)	201,485	3.8	6576	3.9	208,061	3.8
Blank votes (% total votes)	106,268	2.0	1919	1.1	108,187	2.0
Total votes (% registered)	5,319,141	89.1	168,535		5,487,676	
Registered voters	5,973,901					

Órgano Electoral Plurinacional (<http://oep.org.bo>).

Table 2
Distribution of legislative seats following the 2014 Bolivian general election.

Party	Chamber of deputies						Senate		
	List	SMD	Indigenous	Total	%	Change	Total	%	Change
MAS	33	49	6	88	67.6	–	25	69.4	–1
UD	19	12	1	32	24.6	+28	9	25.0	+9
PDC	8	2	0	10	7.7	New	2	5.6	New
MSM	0	0	0	0	0.0	New	0	0.0	New
Green	0	0	0	0	0.0	New	0	0.0	New
Total	60	63	7	130	100.0		36	100.0	

Órgano Electoral Plurinacional (<http://oep.org.bo>).

vote dropped by as much as 13%. This contrasts with 2009, when MAS increased its vote share in every department.

This suggests regional polarization is declining, partly because of efforts to recruit candidates and woo voters from the *media luna*. Meanwhile, the opposition may be coalescing around an established political vehicle. Although UD is in some ways a “new” party, it is clearly an expanded continuation of the *Unidad Nacional* party that Doria Medina has steered since 2004 (Table 2). It is the only party (other than MAS) that has participated in every election since 2003.

Things are slightly more complicated when looking at single-member districts. Overall, MAS candidates did well, winning 49 of 63 uninominal seats. However, there remains a “rural” tendency to the MAS vote; most MAS candidates in urban uninominal districts lost. In several uninominal contests, MAS candidates won by pluralities over a split opposition vote. For example, in two districts in Tarija MAS candidates took only 35% and 33% of the vote, with strong UD and PDC showings splitting the rest. Despite a (slightly) more competitive field than in 2009, MAS retained its two-thirds supermajority in the legislature largely thanks to features of the electoral system.

In terms of the opposition, the clear winner is Doria Medina. UD emerged as the largest opposition block. It finished a strong second in every department, and its uninominal candidates edged out other opposition candidates in all but nine contests. A UD candidate also won the only contest for one of the reserved indigenous seats (in Potosí). On the other hand, Del Granado and MSM were the clear losers. Although this was MSM's presidential debut,

the party made strong showings in municipal elections, emerging as the country's second largest party. The party's implosion was especially pronounced in La Paz, where it failed to win even one uninominal district. Failure to meet the 3% threshold not only meant the party was deprived of the lone list deputy it might have otherwise won, it also meant loss of the party's legal status.

6. Conclusions

The 2014 election suggests Bolivia's party system has realigned. Despite losing handily, the opposition made some significant gains in terms of long-term viability. After two consecutive years as the distant third-place finisher, Doria Medina's political vehicle may now be poised to be the most significant counterweight to MAS. This will be tested in the upcoming 2015 regional and municipal elections. UN enjoyed relative success by forging alliances with a variety of local-level political organizations, rebranding itself UD in the process. If it can build on that success, it may develop into a national front capable of challenging MAS in 2019. But unless anything drastic happens before then, it is now clear that MAS has firmly consolidated its position as a hegemonic party in Bolivia. After three consecutive general elections, it is unlikely that MAS would win less than a clear majority in any national election in a near future.

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