

VIRTUAL DIALOGUES WITH LATIN AMERICA

Elections in Bolivia *What's at Stake?*



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Elections in Bolivia

What's at Stake?

The **Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Arizona**, in collaboration with **Asuntos del Sur** and **University of Texas at Austin** as well as the **Universidad Catolica San Pablo**, with the generous support of the **Confluence Center for Creative Inquiry** presents *Elections in Bolivia: What's at Stake?* as part of the *Virtual Dialogues* series.

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Bolivia's Politics: An Introduction

By Jennifer Cyr

I began traveling to Bolivia in the early 2000s, when Morales was more of a political threat than a likely presidential candidate. Of course, his profile has changed since then. Indeed, Bolivia has changed since Morales was first elected to office. I would like to share some of my reflections about the evolution of Bolivia – and indeed the evolution of Evo – while in office.

For those of you who are less familiar with Bolivian politics, Evo Morales was elected for the first time as president in 2005. His election was remarkable for at least three reasons. First, he obtained an absolute majority in the first round of elections. By capturing almost 54% of the vote, Morales could assume the presidency without forming a formal coalition with any other party. This kind of overwhelming victory – una victoria contundente – had never been achieved in the past. Second, the election of Evo Morales marked the collapse of the party system and the disappearance of the three “traditional” parties that had long dominated politics in the country. The party system underwent a major overhaul as a result. Evo’s party, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), became the predominant party in that system – a fact that remains true to this day. Finally, and perhaps most famously, Morales’ victory represented the election of the country’s first indigenous president.

For all of these reasons, the 2005 election of Morales marked a truly historic change in the country, setting Bolivia on a new economic, social, and political path.

For many authors and policymakers, Evo Morales has sought a leftist government that



Bolivian ballot box

would follow more closely in the footsteps of Venezuela’s

Hugo Chavez than Brazil’s Luis Inácio Lula da Silva. For these analysts, Evo’s election represented the resurgence of a populist, more precarious left in the country – precarious both in terms of his style of governance and in terms of how his tenure might alter or weaken democracy in the country.

This is an overly simplistic comparison. Morales came to power under very different circumstances than Chávez. The latter was elected as an essentially partyless candidate and therefore gained power with few institutional or organizational constraints. Morales, on the other hand, came to power with a host of social movements supporting (and monitoring) his actions. He began his first term with very strong ties to these movements. One question to consider today might be: How did these movements constrain Morales, in terms of his policies, his rhetoric, and his outreach? The MAS has changed greatly since Morales took power. Much of the movement-based support has become increasingly contingent and more critical of Evo and his government. Many social movements that once strongly backed him have rescinded their support entirely. How have Evo’s governance style and policy positions changed as his coalition of support has changed? Have they changed? What has this meant for policy-making?



Certainly, no one can doubt that he has had a real impact while in office. For one, the country is experiencing a period of economic growth. While this growth is due, in great part, to natural gas exports, there is no doubt that Morales' approach to economic policy is much more restrained and indeed prudent than many predicted. In a recent New York



Morales in 2008

Times article Bolivia was viewed as the exception to the rule of economic downturn and insolvency in Latin America. Results are visible in many of the country's cities. El Alto, La Paz's largely indigenous-populated sister city, has experienced an economic renaissance. Many today call it Bolivia's economic capital. Indeed, La Paz is flourishing and becoming increasingly international under Evo. Rather than turning inward, eschewing international investment, and deriding international financial institutions, Evo has adopted a much more pragmatic stance in terms of economic policy and influence from abroad.

Of course, there are still significant economic and social problems in the country. Poverty and inequality remain persistent concerns. The informal economy is still one of the largest in the region. The state relies increasingly on natural gas exports to fund its social policies, which makes it vulnerable to future busts. Will Evo be held accountable for these persisting problems?

Scholarly assessments of Evo's legacy thus far are mixed. Some focus on a singularly important accomplishment of Evo's time in office: he has fostered the inclusion of formerly excluded groups into politics. The poor, the indigenous, individuals with little "formal" education have become, in some ways, the new political elite in the country. He has also implemented major

institutional changes. The most prominent of these is the new constitution. It is symbolically important because it acknowledges the plurinational nature of the Bolivian state, addressing – in theory – longstanding patterns of exclusion that emerged when past governments and political programs attempted to impose a single, Bolivian nationality on all citizens.

Others adopt a much more critical perspective, noting that, despite his rhetoric, Evo has instituted a radical, conservative regime. His government has pursued an entirely orthodox (read: neoliberal) economic agenda wrapped in a radical, populist rhetoric, which enables him to retain very high popularity ratings. Evo's revolution is, as such, not very revolutionary. Because the economic model has not changed, longstanding interests remain entrenched.

Still others argue that Morales' time in office has meant a degradation of the country's democratic regime. Inclusion of some groups has meant the exclusion of others. Evo's concentration of power has come at the expense of horizontal accountability and institutional independence.



Pro Evo/MAS propagand circa 2008

Despite these differences, it is perhaps indisputable that Evo's election is itself a remarkable step forward for Bolivian politics. Evo Morales is, as many like to say, Bolivia's first indigenous president. Evo has built at least part of his base by making ethnic appeals. Given this change, it is important to ask: What has been the impact of this politicization of ethnic identity on the construction of that identity and on racism in the country?

Finally, when Morales was elected, the traditional party system – which was dominated by three parties but included the participation of many more – collapsed. The three parties, Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria

(MIR), and Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN), disappeared from the national electoral landscape. It is no exaggeration to say that the dynamics of political competition were completely transformed when Morales came to power.

Today the MAS is largely unchallenged. Evo Morales has run for the presidency three times. In each election his vote share increased. According to some scholars, he is well-placed to capture an even larger majority in 2014. Part of this success is due to the leader's widespread popularity.

But the predominance of Evo and his party is also a result of the highly fragmented and weakly unified opposition that struggles to compete against the MAS. For example, the electoral landscape that the MAS confronted in 2009



Ex-President Jorge Quiroja

that competed in each election, only two of them competed in both: the MAS and Unidad Nacional. The MAS' competition is incredibly fragile and fluid, even after almost a decade with Evo in the presidency.



La Paz at night

was completely different from that of 2005. In the latter case, Evo's closest competitor, Jorge Quiroga, came from a new, center-right party, called Podemos, which consisted mainly of politicians that had abandoned MIR and ADN. Quiroga came in a distant second, and the party stopped competing in elections shortly after. In 2009, Manfred Reyes Villa fared worse than Quiroga. His coalition of support mostly disintegrated following the election. Of the eight largest parties or coalitions

In nine years, then, the opposition hasn't solidified around any person or party. This makes viably competing against Evo very hard. And it very likely means that Evo can count on one more term in office with quite a wide berth for shaping economic and social policy.

So what, then, to think about Evo Morales thus far in office? What have been the advances made? What about setbacks?

Ethnopoliticism in Action: Evo Morales in Power

by Raúl Madrid

Evo Morales can lay claim to being the most popular president in Bolivian history. He already has triumphed by resounding margins in two elections (2005, 2009) and he stands well-positioned to win a third later this year. His approval rating currently stands at 56 percent, significantly higher than his closest competitors. Moreover, although his party dominates the Bolivian political scene, Morales consistently fares better than other members of his party in elections.

Evo Morales's stunning rise to power and his enduring popularity are based in large part on his ethno-populist strategy. This ethno-populist strategy, I argue, enabled him to fuse together an electoral coalition of rural indigenous people and urban mestizos that propelled him to the presidency.

Moreover, in office, he has also pursued an ethnopoliticism strategy, implementing pro-indigenous as well as populist policies, which have enabled him to consolidate his power and electoral support.

Let me start by explaining what an ethno-populist strategy is and how it contributed to the rise of Evo Morales. Then I will discuss how the policies he has implemented since taking office have reflected this ethno-populist strategy. I conclude by offering an overall assessment of the policies of his first two administrations.

Ethnic appeals

A large part of Evo Morales's support has come from the indigenous population of Bolivia. Indigenous voters have supported Morales for a variety of reasons, but ethnic pride is certainly one of them. Indigenous people have traditionally been politically as well as socioeconomically marginalized in Bolivia. The traditional parties rarely recruited indigenous leaders

as candidates for elected offices or to serve in the governments that they headed, so the election of Morales represents a real breakthrough. Moreover, Morales is not only the first indigenous president of Bolivia, he is the first self-identified indigenous president of any Latin American nation.



Raúl Madrid

Morales' roots in the indigenous movement have also bolstered his support in indigenous communities. Beginning in the early 1990s, Morales forged close ties to a variety of indigenous groups and he has recruited numerous indigenous leaders to his party, although his relationship with some indigenous leaders and organizations has been rocky in recent years.

In addition, Morales has won support in indigenous areas because he has adopted many traditional demands of the indigenous movement, including agrarian reform, indigenous land and water rights, and intercultural education.

Populist appeals

Evo has sought to appeal not just to indigenous people, however, but also to whites and mestizos. He has avoided exclusionary rhetoric and emphasized the inclusive nature of his political project. He has recruited numerous white and mestizo leaders to his party, and he has aggressively sought the support of non-indigenous organizations.

Populist appeals have been a key component of the

efforts of Morales to woo the support of Bolivians of all ethnicities. Populist movements tend to be highly personalistic and the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) is no exception. Morales is a charismatic figure and the MAS's campaigns have been built around him. Morales' charisma lies in part with his folksy, down-to-earth style and his blunt manner, which appeals to ordinary Bolivians.

Like other populists, Morales has used anti-establishment appeals to court support. Morales has criticized the traditional political elites, denouncing them for corruption and incompetence. These anti-establishment appeals have resonated with many Bolivians because of the high levels of corruption in Bolivia and widespread disenchantment with the traditional political elites.

Morales has also resembled traditional populists in his use of statist and nationalist appeals to woo voters. On the campaign trail, Morales virulently denounced neoliberal policies and U.S.-sponsored coca eradication programs. He also vowed to recuperate Bolivia's natural resources. These proposals turned out to be popular with many Bolivian voters who had not benefited from the market reforms or resented traditional U.S. interference in Bolivia.

Ethnic policies

Ethnopolitism has not just been a campaign strategy, it has also been a governing strategy. Since taking office, Evo has used a variety of pro-indigenous as well as populist policies to strengthen his hold on power and consolidate support, especially among the rural indigenous population and urban mestizos.

The Morales administration has implemented a variety of policies that have benefited the indigenous population. Some of these policies have not specifically focused on indigenous people, but they have nevertheless benefited them disproportionately. These include literacy campaigns, agrarian reform policies, and conditional cash transfer programs that have made payments to families that keep their kids in school (the Bono Juancito Pinto program) or have provided funds

to poor women to encourage pre-natal and post-natal visits (the Bono Juana Azurduy program).

The Morales administration has also implemented programs that specifically aim to promote indigenous culture and eliminate discrimination. The government for example, has tightened laws against discrimination and it has sought to expand the teaching of indigenous languages, culture, and history in the public education system.

In addition, the Morales administration pushed through a new constitution that recognizes the country as plurinational and makes the indigenous banner, the wiphala, one of the country's national symbols. The new constitution also recognizes various indigenous tongues as official languages and requires that the central government and departmental governments use at least two official languages.

The new constitution also grants various collective rights to indigenous peoples. These collective rights include the right to collective land ownership, the right to benefit from the natural resources in their territories, control over indigenous knowledge and practices, and the rights to territorial autonomy and self-governance, including the right to elect leaders through traditional methods and the right to use traditional forms of justice.



The Bono Juancito Pinto provides economic incentive to attend school and reduce absenteeism

Finally, the new constitution has sought ensure greater representation of the indigenous population in the halls of power. According to the new constitution, at least two of the members of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and at least one of the members of each of the departmental electoral tribunals are supposed to be of indigenous or peasant origin. The new constitution also calls for the creation of legislative seats specifically for the indigenous population, and it calls for the president to respect the "plurinational character and gender equity in the composition of the cabinet."

Populist policies

The Morales administration has also implemented a variety of populist policies in order to consolidate its

power and support. It has differed from traditional populist regimes, however, in that many of these programs have been funded by tax revenues or foreign aid. It has not declared massive wage hikes or deficit-spending. Indeed, the Morales administration's fiscal policy has been relatively conservative. Nevertheless, Morales' policies have been populist in a number of important ways.

First, the Morales administration has been highly personalistic. Morales has sought to concentrate power in his person. He has undermined horizontal accountability by gaining control of various state institutions, including the legislature, the judiciary, and the electoral tribunal. He has expelled or marginalized any potential challengers to his authority within the MAS. Perhaps most importantly, he has revised the constitution to allow him to run for re-election, and he has backtracked on his assurances that he would not run for a third term.

Second, the Morales administration has pursued a highly anti-establishment agenda, attacking the political and economic establishment and seeking to weaken its power. Morales has routinely denounced opposition parties and leaders in often harsh terms and he has used



Protestors faced off with police in 2012

mass mobilizations and protests to try to intimidate them. It has sought to weaken the departmental prefects who oppose him by forcing them from office or depriving them of resources. The Morales administration has also brought criminal charges against a variety of important political figures, including five former presidents as well as some departmental prefects. In addition, the Morales administration has harshly criticized other establishment institutions, including the media, the Catholic Church, the National Electoral Court and the judiciary.

Third and finally, the Morales administration has been highly nationalist and state interventionist. It has repeatedly attacked the U.S. for intervention in its domestic affairs and it has expelled the Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. ambassador from the country. It has rejected free trade agreements and it has nationalized some foreign-owned companies. Perhaps the Morales administration's most important economic reform to date was the so-called "nationalization" of the Bolivian natural gas industry, which obliged foreign companies to sell a majority of their shares to the Bolivian government and to negotiate new contracts that dramatically increased the prices, royalties, fees, and other taxes these companies had to pay to the Bolivian government. These measures boosted considerably the amount of funds that Bolivia earns from natural gas revenues and helped fund the Morales administration's social programs.

Conclusion

Morales' ethnopopulist policies have helped him consolidate power and support among indigenous people and mestizos alike. They have also brought some economic and social progress. The economy has grown rapidly during the Morales administration and poverty and inequality have fallen. At the same time, however, political polarization has worsened. Although most Bolivians support Morales, at least for now, a large minority bitterly opposes him. Perhaps most worrisome, democracy has deteriorated in some respects. The Morales administration's concentration of power, undermining of horizontal accountability, and its relentless attacks on the opposition have weakened the democratic norms and institutions that had only begun to take root in Bolivia.

The Politics of Evo Morales' Rise to Power in Bolivia: *The Role of Social Movements and Think Tanks*

2011 Executive Summary by Rafael Loayza with Ajoy Datta

On the surface, the role of knowledge and evidence in Bolivia's political landscape appears to be minimal. However, over the years, international donors have invested plenty of economic resources into developing think tanks that produce both knowledge and evidence. This paper seeks to examine the utilisation and impact of this knowledge in Bolivia's recent political history, as well as any links with political institutions. It explores how Evo Morales came to power through the support of indigenous social movements and their relationship with think tanks.

Bolivia's indigenous people, who comprise nearly two thirds of the country's population, have over the centuries been labelled by the State as inferior, ignorant and poor. Ethnicity continued to be subordinate to class-based struggles even after the national revolution. The decline of the mining industry in the 1960s and 1970s, which many indigenous communities relied on, added to pre-existing levels of poverty, and led to significant rural-urban migration amongst the indigenous population. More frequent and intensive interactions accompanied by economic and political inequalities fostered racial tension and as a result, ethnicity started to take on more prominence in Bolivian politics, especially with the government's implementation of structural adjustment

policies in the 1980s in response to economic crisis and the need for loans from the Bretton Woods Institutions.

Economic reforms also included the banning of coca production, an important symbol of indigenous Bolivian culture. The penalisation of coca, along with the perceived selling off of natural resources to foreign interests forged solidarity amongst diverse indigenous groups and huge resentment towards a political system that was seen as increasingly

exclusionary. Since the political system did not appear to represent the interests of the indigenous population, between 1991 and 2003, indigenous people resorted to protests and demonstrations. To quell social unrest the government, assuming politics to be class-based, made some changes to promote inclusion of

indigenous people in the neoliberal development project. This included decentralisation and electoral reform. However, indigenous groups wanted more than just participation in policy-making; they wanted rights to self-determination and an acknowledgement of sovereignty. Unintentionally, the government's changes to the political system provided some additional space



Evo with Pope Francis , 2013

for indigenous movements to further mobilise and form numerous social movements, some of which managed to secure representation (albeit limited) in the legislature. These movements chose to pursue direct action through strikes and blockades including the 'water wars,' which were highly effective in promoting change.



Bolivia's President Evo Morales attends a ritual ceremony honouring Pachamama (Mother Earth), in La Paz, Bolivia. Photograph: Juan Karita/AP

Social movements were not alone in demanding change. Think tanks and NGOs also played a crucial role. Adoption of the Washington Consensus fostered the establishment of a number of think tanks including Fundación Milenio, FUNDEMOS, UDAPE and PRONAGOB (the last two being internal, government think tanks), which helped to broadly legitimise the neoliberal policy agenda, and more specifically provide technical advice. Many of these think tanks had explicit links with traditional political parties. Similarly, the rise of ethnic based politics saw the growth of think tanks in support of indigenous social movements such as CEJIS and CEDLA. They produced and communicated evidence to support their demands, provided them with training and funding, brought diverse social movements together through the development of a coalition (SCCIP) enabling them to speak with one voice and crucially mediated dialogue between them and government. Think tanks in both eras had significant impact in the policy process. Following the removal of two presidents in the early 2000s, in 2005 Evo Morales the head of MAS, who had gradually gained support inside the existing political system (aided by support from outside), formed an interim government. Calling for an early election, Morales won by a large margin as indigenous people clearly voted for him in large numbers. Morales came to power on a ticket of major constitutional reform through the establishment of a Constitutional Assembly.

International actors played a key role in supporting the production of relevant knowledge. Neoliberal think tanks received funding from the World Bank, the IMF, IADB, CAF while think tanks in support of indigenous

social movements received funding from several European donors. They also received support from the anti-globalisation movement and the World Social Forum (WSF). And just as Jeffrey Sachs and Joseph Stiglitz provided policy inputs during the neoliberal era, celebrity academics such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt came in support of Evo Morales' political project. Think tanks often provided cadres of policy-makers in both the neoliberal era and once Morales assumed presidency.

Think tanks in Bolivia have thus had influence on politics and policy-making since 1985, but only due to their connections with political parties, social movements and the executive. Therefore think tanks, though often subordinate to political interests, can be classified as principal actors in the Bolivian political process.

Participant Bios

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Jennifer Cyr's research interests focus on representation, democratization, and institutional stability and change in Latin America. Her recent work examines political party persistence, survival, and adaptation in the Andean countries of Peru, Bolivia, and Venezuela. She received her PhD in Political Science from Northwestern University, and has a MA in Political Science from Northwestern and a MA in Latin American and Caribbean Studies from Florida International University. She has publications in journals and books in the United States, Europe, and Latin America.

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About

Virtual Dialogues with Latin America is a series of events organized by the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Arizona with support from the Confluence Center for Creative Thinking and Asuntos del Sur think tank. The goal is to provide an expository medium by which leading experts in Latin America can interact with students and faculty, not just at the University of Arizona, but world-wide as the events are streamed and make use of social media platforms. The dialogues address pertinent issues that affect Latin America today. Just as we rely on institutional support from the aforementioned organizations and institutions, we also work with and rely on partners throughout Latin America. Thank you to the Confluence Center for Creative Inquiry at the University of Arizona for being a major supporter as well as to Dr. Linda Green for her considerable time and resources in putting this together.

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