

BOLIVIA IN 2017: HEADED INTO UNCERTAINTY

Bolivia en 2017: rumbo a la incertidumbre

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ABSTRACT

The year 2017 was marked by growing uncertainty about the future as Evo Morales continued to prepare for yet another presidential campaign despite growing resistance and a 2016 referendum in which voters rejected a constitutional amendment that would allow Morales to seek a fourth term. The year was also dominated by plans for the December judicial elections, which were just as problematic as they had been in 2011. While economic indicators remained generally positive, there was also growing concern about the future of the economy. 2017 was also the first year that the quality of Bolivian democracy declined significantly, suggesting that 2018 could be a defining year for the country.

Keywords: Bolivia, Evo Morales, judicial election, democracy, reelection, public opinion

RESUMEN

El 2017 de Bolivia estuvo marcado por una creciente incertidumbre. Evo Morales continuó preparándose para otra campaña presidencial, aun en contra de una creciente resistencia y el referéndum de 2016, en cual el electorado rechazó una revisión de la Constitución que hubiera permitido al gobernante una cuarta reelección. El año también estuvo marcado por planes para la eventual elección judicial en diciembre, que fue igual de polémica que la de 2011. Mientras los indicadores económicos se mantuvieron generalmente positivos, hubo un incremento en la incertidumbre sobre el futuro económico. Este también fue el primer año en el que la democracia boliviana fue significativamente menguada, sugiriendo que 2018 puede ser un año crucial para el país.

Palabras clave: Bolivia, Evo Morales, elección judicial, democracia, reelección, opinión pública

I. INTRODUCTION

When the Economist Intelligence Unit released its annual Democracy Index report for 2017, Bolivia's score had dropped to 5.49, qualifying it yet again as a "hybrid regime" (EIU 2018). Although one should be careful not to impute a false sense of precision into these scores, the 2017 Democracy Index score marked the fourth straight decline and continued a general downward trend that began in 2008, the last year Bolivia was rated as a "flawed democracy." The report is consistent with other evaluations of the overall quality of democracy in Bolivia, both by international and domestic evaluators. Of course, 2017 was a year in which many countries around the world saw marked declines in the quality of their democracy, which places Bolivia's struggles in a context of a global decline in support for strengthening democracy. Still, the slow but steady slide in Bolivia's quality of democracy gives cause to worry.

One key factor is the inability to institutionalize the new regime inaugurated by the election of Evo Morales in 2005, which is a result of the uncertainty about the future of his presidency. This may seem paradoxical. At first glance, the regime is incredibly stable: Evo Morales won a third consecutive election in 2015 and his party, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), won supermajorities to both legislative chambers. In power now for more than twelve years—a period that rivals the 1952-1964 National Revolutionary governments—Morales is arguably in a stronger position than at any other time. In fact, Morales is so confident that he plans to run for yet another consecutive term, despite failing to win a referendum in February 2016 to overturn a constitutional prohibition on standing for reelection. But Morales's insistence on remaining at the helm of government exposes a glaring weakness that threatens the long-term viability of the "democratic revolution." Without a clear succession plan, both the regime and the party (MAS) have become increasingly dependent on the personal presence of Evo Morales, who will turn 60 years old next year. And although it seems inevitable that Evo Morales will run for reelection yet again in 2019 (the constitutional court voted unanimously in December 2017 to allow this), declining public support and the defeat of the 2016 referendum suggest that his reelection is no longer guaranteed.

II. 2017: A YEAR IN REVIEW

If 2016 was a year of "democracy in transition" for Bolivia (Driscoll 2017), 2017 seemed to mark a turning point for Bolivian politics. The year was mostly characterized by uncertainty about whether Evo Morales would or would not seek another reelection, although Morales gave few indications that he would do otherwise. Much of the year was also spent in anticipation of the judicial elections, which took place in December.

The year began with some positive signs for Morales's government. In January, Bolivia took a seat on the United Nations Security Council for the first time since 1978, and only the third time in the country's history. The move bolstered the country's status just as Bolivia was beginning a final push for resolution to its territorial dispute with Chile before the International Criminal Court at The Hague. With much fanfare, the inauguration of the Museum of the Democratic and Cultural revolution (often referred to as the "Evo Museum") finally opened (AP 2017). It was hoped that the \$7 million project would be a significant tourist attraction for Morales's home town of Orinoca, a small town of about 700 residents. After more than a decade in power, the MAS-led government finally passed a new coca law, abolishing Ley 1008, which had been in place since 1988 and had been the main source of conflict between the Bolivian state and the *cocaleros*, from which MAS emerged. The new law continued to commit Bolivia to fighting the illicit narcotrafficking of coca, but raised the legal coca limit from 12,000 to 22,000 hectares, declared coca as being of national heritage value, and offered government support for legal coca production and exports (Véliz Morejón 2017). While the economy continued to send mixed signals, economic growth continued to outpace the regional average. Finally, the sensationalistic corruption case against Gabriela Zapata, who was once romantically linked to Morales and later implicated in a \$507 million corruption scandal involving government contracts with the Chinese engineering company CAMC, was winding down. Zapata was sentenced to ten years in prison in May (Guarachi 2017b), and Morales seemed to emerge relatively unscathed.

But the year concluded with some troubling signs for Morales moving forward. Although rains helped alleviate the 2016 water crisis facing the La Paz-El Alto metropolitan area, political fallout continued. This was followed by a series of new water crises that began to hit other cities and regions. As 2017 came to a close, it was clear that water shortages—brought on by climate change and government mismanagement—will certainly become a consistent political issue moving forward. The year also ended with a massive nation-wide strike by medical workers over provisions in a new penal code that would make medical malpractice accusations subject to criminal courts (they are currently reviewed by a medical board). After digging in against the medical workers' strike, Morales capitulated on 8 January 2018 and called on the legislature to abolish the controversial articles, as well as others in the new penal code that had been challenged by other social sectors.

The following sections provide a brief overview of some of the most noteworthy events of 2017 in Bolivia, drawing primarily on newspaper reports. This section also attempts to provide a snapshot of the state of Bolivian social, political, and economic attitudes using the most recent mass survey conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) as part of the 2016/2017 AmericasBarometer. The LAPOP Bolivia survey took place from 16 March to 3 May and included a stratified sample of 1,691 respondents. In addition to references to the kind of periodic public opinion polls reported in Bolivian press,

the LAPOP data offers a robust snapshot of Bolivian attitudes and opinions relevant to this report.

The Economy

Until recently, Bolivia's economy has generally done well under Evo Morales. Only in 2009 did gross domestic product (GDP) annual growth fall below 4% (to a respectable 3.4%). Moreover, inflation—the specter that has haunted Bolivia since the hyperinflation crisis of the early 1980s—continues to be under control, and 2017 marked the lowest annual inflation rate (2.7%) since 2009 (Página Siete 2018b). Still, worries about an “economic crisis” continue, particularly with the steady decline in economic growth since 2013, when GDP growth peaked at an annual rate of 6.8% (World Bank 2018). The problem stems primarily from overly optimistic budgets on behalf of the Bolivian government. The government budget announced in November 2017 was made under the assumption that GDP would increase by 4.7% (Guarachi 2017a) even though the annual growth rate between July 2016 and June 2017 had only reached 3.94% (La Razón 2017c). Part of the decline in growth is due to falling oil and gas production, even as oil and gas prices have increased since 2016 (Mamani 2018). More troubling is that Bolivia has maintained a trade deficit every month since July 2015, ending with a deficit of US\$ 144.12 million in November 2017 (Trading Economics 2018). Thus, while Bolivia's economy is not in a recession and continues to grow at a modest pace, government revenues are frequently falling short of expectations, leading to significant deficit spending.

Not surprisingly, 25.3% of respondents in the LAPOP survey list “the economy” as the greatest problem facing Bolivia, with “crime” a distant second at 11.7%. However, there is evidence to suggest that worries about an “economic crisis” may be exaggerated. The same LAPOP poll showed that while 43.7% of respondents believed the economic situation of the country was “worse” (compared to 33.2% who thought it was “the same” and 23.1% who thought it was “better”), Bolivians were somewhat more positive about their own individual economic situation: 42.9% thought their situation was “the same” and only 35.4% thought it was “worse.” Moreover, the two questions were only modestly correlated ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$). Nevertheless, the long-term trajectory does not look good. Just before coming to power, Bolivia began registering trade surpluses for the first time in more than a decade. Morales was able to enjoy continued trade surpluses throughout his presidency and built up one of the largest cash reserves (as a share of GDP) in the region. The country's cash reserves of \$8.2 billion remain far larger than they were in 2005, before Morales came to power, but have dwindled to nearly half of their 2015 peak (Trading Economics 2018). Another cause for concern is that after more than a decade of MAS-led government, the structure of Bolivia's economy remains relatively unchanged, with hydrocarbons and other mineral resources accounting for about 70% of the country's exports (Trading Economics 2018).

One area of success has been in Bolivia's social economic policies, particularly with *bonos* such as Renta Dignidad, Bono Juancito Pinto, and Bono Juana Azurduy. Most of these programs are universal, and benefits are given to qualifying citizen regardless of income. The most well established is Renta Dignidad, the old-age pension that was created as Bono Solidario (BONOSOL) during the first presidency of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. In 2017, the pension payments were increased to Bs 300 per month for those without pensions and Bs 250 for those with pensions (Guarachi 2017c). Bono Juancito Pinto is a voucher program created in 2006 that awards an annual Bs 200 to each child enrolled in public school. In 2017, 2.2 million school children received the cash payment after demonstrating good attendance during the previous six months (Ariñez 2017b). Overall, the unconditional cash transfer programs have been viewed as a success, particularly in improving educational and quality of life outcomes for rural and indigenous populations (Canavire-Bacarreza et al. 2017). Another highly successful program is the Bono Juana Azuduy, which targets new and expectant mothers and their young children. Created in 2009, it gives benefits totaling Bs 1820 that include nutrition supplements and pre- and postnatal medical care.

Past policy missteps, however, continued to plague the government. A scandal related to the Fondo Indígena (FONDIOC), a rural assistance program, led to the resignation of various ministers and other government officials in 2015 (Alberti 2016). A new Fondo de Desarrollo Indígena (FDI) was created in September 2015. In May, the fund's director, Vicente Yujra Coronado, was replaced by Braulio Yucra, after accusations emerged that Yujra had taken kickbacks when he was mayor of a rural Laja municipality (Pomacahua 2017a). Yucra had been named only a few months earlier in January, replacing the outgoing Eugenio Rojas. Within days of the announcement, accusations of fiscal mismanagement related to Yujra's management of government contracts surfaced (Layme 2017d). After a rocky three years, the new FDI announced its first project, an irrigation system in Zudañez municipality (Chuquisaca) in August, with an estimated cost of Bs 3.8 million (Correo del Sur 2017).

Society

Despite problems on the economic horizon, it is certainly true that the years since Morales came to power have seen significant improvement for many Bolivians—especially those most closely associated with rank-and-file MAS supporters: the rural and urban poor, and indigenous Bolivians. According to World Bank data, poverty and inequality (as measured by the Gini index) have steadily declined over the last decade. Although poverty rates for 2017 are not yet publicly available, the LAPOP survey data offers some insight into the financial wellbeing of Bolivians in 2017: When asked about their family's economic situation, only 11.5% answered that they had “not enough, having a hard time,” while another 38.6% responded “not enough, and are stretched.”

While 23.2% of respondents said their income had increased in the last two years, 32.4% said their incomes had decreased during that time. However, when asked about “life satisfaction,” 28.9% of respondents said they were “very satisfied” and another 54.7% said they were “somewhat satisfied.” Recently, the economic conditions have started to unsettle, but many of the gains made in the last decade—particularly in education and health—seem to have become entrenched. The problems identified by Bolivians seem to be much more systemic and consistent. After the economy (25.3%) and unemployment (9.7%), Bolivians listed crime (11.7%), water (7.6%), and corruption (7.1%) as the most important problems facing the country.

The issue of water emerged as an important problem in November 2016, when a combination of drought and poor infrastructure management led to an acute water shortage in the La Paz-El Alto metropolitan area. The issue was declared a national crisis, and prompted the government to undertake drastic measures, including water rationing, importing water in fuel tankers, and even an air force campaign to “bombard” clouds to produce rain (Pomacahua 2017b). Although the crisis was widely recognized as a symptom of global climate change, public opinion blamed government officials. A survey by the public opinion firm Mercados y Muestras found that 79% of La Paz residents said they believed the water shortages could have been avoided if the government had taken better preventative steps (Página Siete 2017b). Much of the blame was heaped on Alexandra Moreira, the Minister of Water and Environment, who resigned on 18 January, only hours before she was called to answer questions on the matter before the legislature (Ariñez 2017d). Shortly after, Morales announced his government would make significant investments in the water infrastructure (Pinto 2017), and in July the government announced the construction of three new water reservoirs for the La Paz-El Alto metropolitan area (Página Siete 2017h).

By February, largely due to heavy rains, water reservoirs around La Paz had risen back to normal levels. However, the water crisis further strained the relationship between the Morales government and the mayors of La Paz and El Alto (both opposition figures), who initiated formal legal proceedings against government officials, including Moreira and the ex-directors of the Empresa Pública Social de Agua y Saneamiento (EPSAS) and the Autoridad de Fiscalización y Control Social de Agua (AAPS), who had also resigned because of the water crisis (Página Siete 2017o). In September, the mayors announced a proposal to create a new metropolitan public water company (Columba 2017b). Water has remained a highly salient public issue, particularly after similar shortages hit the departments of Oruro, Potosí, and Chuquisaca (Página Siete 2017b).

For more than a decade, Bolivian society has also been described as highly polarized, and it has become conventional wisdom to argue that Evo Morales is a highly polarizing figure in Bolivian politics. Both opposition to and support for Morales and his MAS party are visible and clearly a source of intense political

mobilization, but it is not clear that Bolivian society is itself highly polarized politically. According to the recent LAPOP survey, Bolivians are not very polarized politically, with the bulk of respondents placing themselves near the political center, with a mean of 5.2 and 31.9% of respondents giving themselves a “5” on a 10-point left-right ideological scale. More interestingly, self-identified MAS supporters were not significantly different from the overall sample mean ($t = -3.05, p < 0.001$).

Another frequent characterization of Bolivia is that it is a country deeply divided between an indigenous majority and a historically privileged white/*mestizo* elite. There is clearly truth to this, and Bolivia’s indigenous population is disproportionately poor and both socially and politically marginalized. Certainly, one of the major advances of the Morales government has been to put this issue at the center of Bolivian public life and also make significant advances to address this issue. But the most recent census called some of that into question. The 2001 census had established the often-cited figure that 62% of the population was indigenous. Thus, it was surprising that a decade later—and well after Morales came to power—the 2012 census found that only 40% of the population identified as indigenous. Some of this discrepancy can be attributed to slight differences in the way the question was framed (Albó 2012). But that finding is rather consistent with surveys that specifically include the ethnic category of *mestizo* in self-identification questions (which neither the 2001 nor the 2012 census did), such as the LAPOP surveys. The most recent LAPOP survey found that 68.2% of Bolivians identified as *mestizo*, with only 14.6% identifying as indigenous. LAPOP surveys use a weighted stratified sampling (see LAPOP 2017b) that reduces any suspected urban bias, and their inclusion of the *mestizo* category in their survey (unlike the census) drives down *both* the self-reported “indigenous” and “white” response categories, relative to the census. Yet even the Bolivian census found a sharp decline (from 62% in 2001 to 40% in 2012) in indigenous self-identification. All this suggests that ethnic identity in Bolivia is much more fluid and dynamic than is often recognized.

Politics

Without a doubt, the biggest political issue dominating 2017 was the question of whether or not Morales would run for yet another reelection bid in 2019. Early in the year, MAS began campaigning with the slogan that “Morales is essential” (*imprescindible*) to Bolivia (Corz 2017c). On 21 February, the anniversary of the 2016 constitutional referendum, MAS held rallies to remember the “day of the lie” (*día de la mentira*). This issue colored the year’s judicial elections, which the opposition tried to frame as a de facto referendum on public support for Morales’ continuation in office. The fact that pre-election polls have consistently included Morales among the potential candidates for the presidency—despite his loss in the January 2016 referendum that would have allowed him to run for another term—is seen by most observers as a sign that Morales is likely to

be the MAS candidate in 2019. But declining public support for Evo Morales throughout 2017 has made his reelection questionable.

Table 1. Voter intention polls, January 2017–January 2018[†]

	EVO MORALES	CARLOS MESA	SAMUEL DORIA MEDINA	RUBEN COSTAS	UNSURE/ NONE
January ¹	31	16	10	9	24
March ²	26	20	12	8	22
May ³	29	21	17	5	26
July ⁴	28	21	8	10	20
September ⁵	27	17	8	11	26
October ⁶	37	20	3	10	21
November ⁷	31	20	6	13	18
January 2018 ⁸	22	—	13	15	34

¹ Página Siete 2017m. ² Página Siete 2017k. ³ Página Siete 2017i. ⁴ Página Siete 2017g. ⁵ Página Siete 2017f. ⁶ Página Siete 2017e. ⁷ El País 2017. ⁸ Página Siete 2017a. Carlos Mesa was not included in the January 2018 poll because he had announced that he would not be a candidate in 2019.

[†]All of the reported polls were conducted by Mercados y Muestra, with the exception of the November poll (reported by El País), which was conducted by Captura Consulting. There was no reported Mercados y Muestra poll during November 2017. While both polling organizations are reputable, Mercados y Muestra is most consistent in its methodology.

Voting intention surveys throughout 2017 and January 2018 showed Evo Morales ahead of his main rivals, but with much narrower leads than in previous years (see Table 1). Of course, voter intention polls are not very accurate in Bolivia, and Evo Morales has tended to do better than polls suggest. Still, his support going into previous elections has tended to be higher. In the months preceding the 2014 election (which he won with 61.4% of the popular vote), Morales had been polling at 59% (Cuiza 2014). In the most recent polls, all of the voters who said they were unsure or who planned to vote for some candidate other than those offered by pollsters would have to swing towards Morales for him to have to be sure of a simple majority. In December, former president Carlos Mesa announced that he would not be a candidate in 2019. The move cleared the way for a significant increase the chances of Samuel Doria Medina, perennial presidential candidate and leader Unidad Democrática (UD), the largest opposition party in the legislature, and Rubén Costas, the governor of the department of Santa Cruz. By January 2018, shortly after the judicial elections and the weeks-long medical workers' strike, Morales had dropped to only 22% support in voter intention polls, less than 10 points ahead of either of his two principal rivals.

Evo Morales's lackluster support in voter intention polls mirrored his decline in public approval ratings. In an annual public opinion poll of support for leaders by Ipsos Public Affairs, Morales' approval ratings had fallen for the second straight year, from 48% in 2015 to 37% in 2017 (Los Tiempos 2017). Grassroots public opinion remained higher, with 57% approval in October (Página Siete 2017d). However, a public opinion poll in November showed that an overwhelming 75% opposed allowing Morales to run for president indefinitely, and 60% said it was illegal for the constitutional court to allow Morales to run for another reelection (Página Siete 2017c). Those numbers far exceed the "No" votes in the 2016 referendum, suggesting problems for a 2019 Morales presidential candidacy.

Nevertheless, shortly before the judicial elections concluded, Morales won approval by the outgoing elected constitutional court to run for reelection in 2019 (Layme 2017b). The court's decision was unanimous, based on Morales's argument that every Bolivian citizen had a human right to run for office, which could not be abridged by national law. Morales' lawyers appealed to the American Convention of Human Rights, arguing that Article 256 of the Bolivian constitution applied international conventions "preferentially" over national laws. In its decision, the constitutional court also ruled that all elected public offices (which also had limitations on reelection) would be open to indefinite reelection. In a surprising move, Katia Uriona, president of the nation's electoral court, publicly asked for clarification from the constitutional court, since the 2016 referendum had been legally framed as a binding referendum (Layme 2017a). The objection was quickly dismissed by MAS legislative leaders, who argued that Uriona was out of line and that the question was a nonissue, since the court's ruling did not modify the text of the Bolivian constitution, which had been the issue put before voters in the referendum (Página Siete 2017a).

A significant factor in the steep decline in public support for Morales by January 2018 was the nationwide strike led mainly by medical workers. Protests began on 23 November, with medical workers opposed to some provisions of a proposed new penal code (Peñaranda 2018). In particular, medical workers objected to Article 205, which they argued defined "malpractice" in overly broad terms and made it a criminal offense to be tried in criminal courts (rather than a civil matter to be determined by medical review boards). The protests spread to include criticism of other articles, such as provisions in Articles 293 and 294, which seemed to define many forms of protest as "sedition." As the protests grew, other sectors soon found other objectionable articles. After the new penal code was passed on 15 December and signed into law by acting president Alvaro García Linera,¹ the protests intensified. Medical workers went on a nationwide strike, and protests continued through the Christmas holiday

¹ In Bolivia, whenever the president travels out of the country, the vice president becomes acting president and assumes all presidential powers.

until 8 January 2018, shortly after Evo Morales publicly asked the legislature to rescind the new penal code (Página Siete 2018c).

In December, Vice President Alvaro García Linaera publicly announced that he would not be a vice presidential candidate in 2019 (Montero 2017a). It is too early to know how this will affect Morales' reelection. García Linaera has been vice president under Morales since the two were elected in December 2005. One of Morales' staunchest supporters, García Linaera also serves as the nexus between Morales and the urban intelligentsia. García Linaera continues to rally support for Morales' reelection, so it is most likely he is stepping down to create space for another important figure, perhaps David Choquehuanca, the former Foreign Minister.

International Relations

Bolivian foreign relations in 2017 were dominated by its disputed claim for access to the sea, which was proceeded to the International Court of Justice at The Hague. Bolivia has long maintained a territorial dispute with Chile over lands lost in the 1879-1884 War of the Pacific. Although not a central issue in Morales' first presidency, it became a central concern as his second term ended and he looked forward to the 2014 presidential elections. In 2013, Bolivia sent a diplomatic team that included two former presidents—Carlos Mesa and Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé—to argue the case. Over the past few years, Bolivia has made "*mar para Bolivia*" an international campaign. The government commissioned the writing of *El Libro del Mar* (Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia 2014), a collection of historical documents and other writings that support Bolivia's claim to sovereign access to the sea. By 2017, the book had been distributed throughout the country's schools and had even been translated into numerous foreign languages to distribute around the world—including efforts to distribute it in Chile—in an attempt to sway international public opinion (Rojas Paz 2017). The book is also freely available as a PDF document (along with numerous other publications) from the Dirección Estratégica de Reivindicación Marítima (DIREMAR), the Bolivian agency created in 2011 to oversee Bolivia's domestic and international efforts on this issue. In June, Bolivia announced that the issue would be the top priority for its mission to the Organization of American States (Quiroz 2017).

III. ELECTIONS

In 2017, Bolivia held its second national judicial elections. The 2011 judicial elections had been something of an experiment, as Bolivia became the first country in the world to elect its top judicial offices. That election, however, had been marred by a high number of blank and null votes following a controversial and confusing candidate selection process. Although the electoral process was much smoother, some of the same problems plagued the 2017 judicial election.

The election was originally scheduled for October but had to be postponed because of problems with the nomination process. Like the 2011 election, the process began with potential candidates presenting their qualifications to a special legislative committee, which would then select a field of qualified candidates. In June, the legislature extended the deadline and pushed back the election because of an insufficient number of qualified candidates (Montero 2017c). In July, the Comité Ejecutivo de la Universidad Boliviana (CEUB), which was charged with evaluating the candidates, observed that prospective candidates did not have required scores (Corz 2017b), again pushing back the date for candidate selection. Because MAS held a supermajority in both legislative chambers, the opposition decried that it would not have a say in helping select the candidates and publicly argued that MAS legislators would deliberately select candidates that would support their agenda. In the end, the opposition withdrew from participation in the process and on 30 August the legislature approved the full slate of candidates without any opposition votes (Carvajal 2017).

The electoral process was similar to 2011 (see Deheza 2012), although three of the bodies had been restructured: 96 candidates vied for 52 positions on four distinct judicial bodies. Both the Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (TSJ), the highest civil and criminal court, and the Tribunal Constitucional Plurinacional (TCP), the constitutional court, were elected in nine departmental districts, with four candidates in each district (two males, two females, following the gender parity electoral quota adopted in 2009). In each district, the frontrunner would win election, with the second-place candidate chosen as an alternate (*suplente*). In 2011, the TSJ had been elected in a nationwide district and only seven candidates were chosen. The Tribunal Agroambiental, a special court for land and environmental matters, and the Consejo de la Magistratura, the judiciary's main administrative organ, were both elected in single, nation-wide districts. Voters could vote for any one of 14 candidates to the Tribunal Agroambiental, and the top five vote winners would be elected (in 2011 that number had been seven). Voters selected from among 10 candidates to the Consejo de la Magistratura, and the top three would be elected (in 2011 that number had been five).

In addition, candidates were not allowed to campaign on their own behalf, nor were other groups allowed to campaign for individual candidates. The Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE), the electoral court, strictly enforced the ban on candidates campaigning for themselves, and eliminated one candidate (Hans

Soruco, a candidate for the constitutional court) for doing so. As in 2011, in an effort to give all candidates a level playing field, all candidate materials were to be distributed by the TSE in official publications that included brief candidate biographies and credentials, along with their photograph. News media networks were not allowed to interview candidates, unless they gave all candidates equal time. As in 2011, there were widespread complaints that voters knew very little about prospective candidates and could not make informed decisions. A public opinion poll taken a little more than a week before the election showed that 87% of respondents did not know the professional trajectory of any candidate and 79% did not know who they would vote for (Layne 2017c).

Again, like in 2011, the opposition publicly urged voters to cast blank or null ballots as a form of protest. In particular, the opposition hoped to mobilize voters against the decision by the outgoing court—only days before the election—to allow Morales to run for another reelection in 2019. A coalition of key opposition figures, including former presidents Carlos Mesa and Jorge Quiroga, signed an open letter calling on voters to cast null votes (Montero 2017b). Nevertheless, the election went ahead as scheduled on 3 December, and voting was relatively orderly throughout the country. Only four precincts in the department of Beni had reported voting irregularities, and voting there was repeated several days later (La Razón 2017b). International observers declared the election a success, although the OAS delegation recommended that in the future additional funds be given to help better spread information about candidates, including money to allow candidates to travel to campaign (Cuiza 2017).

Table 2. 2017 judiciary elections and results for nationwide districts

	TURNOUT 2017	BLANK/ NULL 2017	BLANK/ NULL 2011	PERCENT CHANGE IN BLANK/NULL
Tribunal Agroambiental	84.22	64.98	57.66	7.32
Consejo de la Magistratura	84.22	67.36	58.01	9.35

Data from OEP 2017a and OEP 2017b.

Table 3. Election results for Tribunal Supremo de Justicia, 2017

	TURNOUT 2017	BLANK/ NULL 2017	BLANK/ NULL 2011	PERCENT CHANGE IN BLANK/NULL	MAS 2014
Chuquisaca	81.35	67.80	60.79	7.01	63.38
La Paz	87.92	64.19	58.24	5.95	68.92
Cochabamba	84.90	60.31	56.66	3.65	66.67
Oruro	86.41	60.40	59.22	1.18	66.42
Potosí	81.63	66.13	57.80	8.33	69.49
Tarija	80.15	70.45	70.30	0.15	51.58
Santa Cruz	82.75	69.66	69.71	-0.05	48.99
Beni	76.93	62.02	71.31	-9.29	41.49
Pando	74.92	58.59	60.15	-1.56	52.09

Data from OEP 2017a and OEP 2017b.

Table 4. Election results for Tribunal Constitucional Plurinacional, 2017

	TURNOUT 2017	BLANK/ NULL 2017	BLANK/ NULL 2011	PERCENT CHANGE	MAS 2014
Chuquisaca	81.42	65.35	59.04	6.31	63.38
La Paz	87.94	64.81	51.07	13.74	68.92
Cochabamba	84.89	60.48	53.33	7.15	66.67
Oruro	86.37	62.65	53.44	9.21	66.42
Potosí	81.70	62.57	55.26	7.31	69.49
Tarija	80.10	69.46	67.67	1.79	51.58
Santa Cruz	83.86	73.39	67.36	6.03	48.99
Beni	76.95	67.79	74.86	-7.07	41.49
Pando	74.82	56.20	68.11	-11.91	52.09

Data from OEP 2017a and OEP 2017b.

The election results show that the opposition “boycott” calling for blank and null votes was highly successful (see Tables 2-4). The number of blank and null votes exceeded the 2011 figure in almost every district. In addition, because the gender parity quota was only applied to candidate lists, the results did not produce gender parity—although they came close: 37% of the candidates elected were women, a slight decrease from the 43% in 2011 (Ariñez 2017a).

IV. THE EXECUTIVE, THE LEGISLATURE, AND THE SEPARATION OF POWERS

The Executive

At the end of 2017, President Morales marked a dozen years in power, making him the longest continuously serving president in Bolivia's history. By the middle of 2018, Morales will have surpassed Victor Paz Estenssoro for the longest total time as president. This also makes Alvaro García Linera, who has been Morales's vice president since winning as his running mate in the December 2005 election, the longest serving vice president in Bolivia's history.

Table 5. Cabinet Composition, 2017

Foreign Relations	Fernando Huanacuni Mamani
Presidency	René Martínez Callahuanca
Government	Carlos Gustavo Romero Bonifaz [†]
Defense	Reymi Luis Ferreira Justiniano [†]
Planning and Development	Mariana Prado Noya
Economy and Public Finance	Luis Arce Catacora [†] Mario Alberto Guillén Suárez ^a
Hydrocarbons	Luis Alberto Sánchez Fernández [†]
Energy	Rafael Alarcón Orihuela
Productive Development and Plural Economy	Eugenio Rojas Apaza
Public Works, Services, and Housing	Milton Claros Hinojosa [†]
Mines and Metallurgy	Felix Cesar Navarro Miranda [†]
Justice and Institutional Transparency	Héctor Enrique Arce Zaconeta
Work, Employment, and Social Welfare	Héctor Andrés Hinojosa Rodríguez
Health	Ariana Campero Nava [†]
Environment and Water	Carlos René Ortuño Yañez
Education	Roberto Ivan Aguilar Gómez [†]
Rural Development and Land	Cesar Hugo Cocarico Yana [†]
Cultures and Tourism	Wilma Alanoca Mamani
Communication	Gisela López Rivas
Sports	Tito Rolando Montaña Rivera [†]

Ministerial appointments as reported in Guarachi (2017). [†]Reappointed from 2016.

^aGuillén Suárez was appointed June 26, 2017, after Arce Catacora resigned due to health reasons.

At the start of 2017, Morales modified his cabinet significantly, naming ten new ministers. In a surprising move, longtime ally David Choquehuanca was replaced as Foreign Minister (Chancellor) by Fernando Huanacuni Mamani. Some commentators speculated that the move was meant to signal a “generational change” in the party’s leadership, in anticipation of the upcoming elections (Atahuichi 2017), or to give the close confidant freedom to rebuild the party’s relationship with rural sectors (Tapia 2017). Like Choquehuanca, who had served as Foreign Minister since Morales’ first cabinet in 2006, Huanacuni is an Aymara intellectual, but one with a more spiritualist bent (Huanacuni has a PhD in Human Transformation from the Zambuling Institute in Washington, DC). Another longtime cabinet member, Juan Ramón Quintana, who served in various positions including as Minister of the Presidency (2006-2009 and 2012-2016) was also replaced. Juan Ramón Quintana had been a controversial figure in Morales’ cabinet: a graduate of the US-based School of the Americas, he had served in the government of former dictator Hugo Banzer. Quintana was replaced by René Martínez, who was elected as a senator for MAS in 2009 and served as president of that chamber. The departures of Choquehuanca and Quintana left only Carlos Romero as the longest serving minister, having served in various capacities since 2008. A major change to the cabinet was the dissolution of the Ministry of Autonomies, which was reduced to a vice-ministry under the Presidency Ministry. Other changes including merging the Ministry of Transparency into the Ministry of Justice and creating a new Ministry of Energy, which was split off from the previous Ministry of Hydrocarbons & Energy. The composition of Morales’ cabinet is listed in Table 5.

The Legislature

The Plurinational Legislative Assembly is a bicameral legislature made up of a 130-member Chamber of Deputies and a 36-member Senate. Both chambers are elected concurrently with the president. Each department elects four members to the Senate using a D’Hondt proportional electoral formula that uses the votes cast for presidential candidates to determine the share of seats to be distributed from the party lists. Because each district has four seats, the results are not proportional, and it is possible for one party to win all four seats in a department. In the 2014 election, MAS won all four seats in two departments (La Paz and Oruro), and won three of four seats in three others. The lower house is elected using a mixed-member proportional electoral system with three tiers. There are seven reserved (“special”) single-member districts for small indigenous communities, all elected using simple plurality. There are 63 “uninominal” single-member districts elected by simple plurality. Finally, there are 60 “plurinominal” seats in multimember, department-wide districts. These are also elected using D’Hondt proportional representation, but with seats awarded to ensure proportionality after accounting for the uninominal (but not the “special” indigenous) district representatives. In addition, there is a 3% electoral threshold (although parties that win a single-member district contest

outright may keep those seats, even if they fail to meet the electoral threshold). Overall, the electoral system tends to give advantages to larger parties, which benefits MAS, which won 67.7% of the legislative seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 69.4% in the Senate. The breakdown of seats in the legislature is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Seat distribution in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly

	CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES			TOTAL	SENATE
	PLURINOMINAL (LIST) SEATS	UNINOMINAL (SMD) SEATS	SPECIAL RESERVED SEATS		
MAS-IPSP	33	49	6	88	25
UD	19	12	1	32	9
PDC	8	2		10	2

Each legislative chamber also has an executive committee, and there is a joint executive committee to oversee the entire chamber, headed by the vice president, who is the constitutional president of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly. Each chamber's executive committee has a president, two vice presidents, and four secretaries. Currently, Lilly Gabriela Montaña Viaña (MAS) has been the President of the Chamber of Deputies since 2015; she was previously President of the Senate (2010-2015). The current President of the Senate is José Alberto Gonzales Samiando (MAS), first elected to a legislative position in 2014, having previously served as ambassador to Argentina during Morales' second term.

Table 7. Current legislative commissions, by chamber

CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES / COMMISSIONS	SENATE
Constitution, Legislation, and Electoral System	Constitution, Human Rights, Legislation, and Electoral System
Ethics	
Plural Justice, Public Prosecutor, and Legal Defense of the State	Plural Justice, Public Prosecutor, and Defense of the State
Planning, Political Economy, and Finances	Planning, Political Economy, and Finances
Plural Economy, Production, and Industry	Plural Economy, Production, and Industry
Territorial Organization and Autonomies	Territorial Organization and Autonomies

CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES / COMMISSIONS	SENATE
Indigenous Peoples, Cultures, and Interculturality	Indigenous Peoples and Interculturality
Education and Health	Education and Health
Human Rights	
Social Politics	
Government, Defense, and Armed Forces	State Security, Armed Forces, and Police
International Politics and Migrant Protection	International Politics
Amazon Region, Land, Territory, Water, Natural Resources, and Environment	Land, Natural Resources, and Environment
Special Investigation of Privatization and Capitalization	

Source: Camara de Diputados (<http://www.diputados.bo>) and Camara de Senadores (<http://senado.gob.bo>).

The legislative chambers conduct much of their day-to-day business within commissions (*comisiones*), many of which also have subordinate committees. Additionally,

Members of both government and opposition parties serve on legislative commissions and committees. Currently, the Chamber of Deputies has 14 commissions and the Senate has 10. Table 7 lists the legislative commissions, by chamber, arranged together with their closest counterparts in the other chamber.

The Judiciary

Since 2011, Bolivia's judiciary seems largely defined by its controversial and confusing electoral system. In theory, the election of judicial authorities was supposed to depoliticize the judiciary, by democratizing it through nonpartisan elections. There is some merit to this idea. After all, if Morales had truly wanted to control the judiciary, he would not have allowed for openly contested judicial elections. Having enjoyed clear legislative majorities throughout his time in power, he could easily have (under the previous system) simply appointed judicial authorities. What judicial elections have largely done, instead, is reduce confidence in the competence and quality of the justice system itself. In both 2011 and 2017, most professional barristers boycotted the process and did not participate in the nomination process. This may have produced candidate pools with little or no previous experience, or (in some cases) with dubious credentials. One of the most colorful characters that emerged from the 2011 judicial elections was Gualberto Cusi, an indigenous candidate elected to the

Constitutional Tribunal. Soon after he was elected, he initiated controversy when the Legislative Assembly called on him to explain statements he made regarding his use of reading coca leaves as a way to help resolve “difficult cases” (Guarachi 2012). Cusi continued to skirt controversy until June 2017, when the Senate stripped him of his bench (Cuiza 2017b).

According to the 2017 LAPOP Bolivia survey, 38.2% of respondents have no confidence that the judiciary will punish the guilty, while 30% have only little confidence. Additionally, 56.1% say that the judiciary is not politically independent. Overall, the courts are the least trusted institutions—after the perennially unpopular political parties (see Table 8). However, public confidence in the legislature is not particularly worse than public confidence in other political institutions.

Table 8. Public confidence in political institutions

	POLITICAL PARTIES	EXECUTIVE	LEGISLATURE	JUDICIARY	LOCAL GOVERNMENT	ELECTIONS
Not at all	33.7	17.3	13.0	17.3	13.0	12.1
2	17.2	10.4	10.5	19.2	10.6	8.8
3	18.3	10.7	16.7	22.8	15.3	14.9
4	14.4	15.1	20.2	19.2	22.7	19.2
5	9.0	15.8	18.1	12.9	19.3	21.9
6	4.1	14.0	12.0	4.6	11.9	14.5
A lot	3.2	16.9	9.7	4.0	7.3	8.8

Data from LAPOP 2017a.

Opposition Parties

Opposition parties serve as important institutional checks in any democracy. In Bolivia, although opposition forces are vocal and frequently mobilize, they are highly fragmented and ineffective outside regional power bases or small circles of intellectuals and pundits. Many opposition figures are holdovers from the pre-Morales political scene. This includes Carlos Mesa, the independent public intellectual who was recruited by Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada to serve as the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) vice presidential candidate in the 2002 election. After Sánchez de Lozada resigned in the midst of the so-called 2003 “gas war,” Mesa assumed the presidency—until he, too, was forced to resign in 2005. Since then, Mesa has flirted with the idea of running for president but has never done so. He has also not joined or built a political party

Other opposition figures have tried to build new political parties but have largely failed to institutionalize their new organizations. Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga, who served as Banzer’s vice president from 1997 until the latter resigned due to terminal illness in 2001, was Morales’ strongest opponent in the 2005 presidential election. Rather than campaign under the banner of Banzer’s Democratic Nationalist Action (ADN) party, Quiroga formed a new political vehicle, Democratic and Social Power (Podemos), that was largely a cobbling together of pre-2003 parties. That party did not survive to the next election. Two other figures include Manfred Reyes Villa and Samuel Doria Medina. Prior to the 2005 election, Doria Medina had assembled a new political party (National Unity, UN) that was well financed and organized. Nevertheless, the party founded by one of the country’s wealthiest men came a distant third in the 2005 and 2009 elections. Reyes Villa, who had virtually tied with Evo Morales in the 2002 presidential election, created yet another political party (his third) to run against Morales in the 2009 presidential election. The new National Convergence (PPB-CN) party did not survive to the next election, and Reyes Villa faded from the political scene. In the 2014 presidential election, Doria Medina finally emerged as the leader of the largest opposition party, behind a rebranded Democratic Union (UD). That election also saw Quiroga run for the presidency as a candidate for the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), placing a distant third. Heading into the 2019 election, the only institutionalized opposition party is Doria Medina’s UD, but former opposition leaders like Mesa and Quiroga always draw potential support away from Doria Medina in voting intention polls.

The only truly successful opposition parties are local or regional parties, which are often hegemonic in their own limited spheres. The city of La Paz was dominated by Juan Del Granado’s Movimiento Sin Miedo (MSM) since 1999. The center-left party was a close regional ally of MAS in the 2005 election, but soon split with Morales over its insistence on running its own slate of candidates in the 2010 municipal elections. After the electoral court stripped the party of its name and symbols, Del Granado’s successor, Luis Revilla, renamed the movement Sol.bo (Sovereignty and Liberty for Bolivia). It has continued its dominance in the city of La Paz and in many other municipalities (mostly around the La Paz region). The city of Santa Cruz has, since 2005, been governed by Percy Fernandez, who has campaigned under a new party name in each municipal election. Although he is an ally of Ruben Costas, who has been governor of Santa Cruz department since 2005, the two belong to different political parties. This pattern tends to repeat itself across the country, with political vehicles built almost exclusively around a local or regional political boss.

V. QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

The quality of democracy in Bolivia has not significantly changed in the last year. Many common democracy indices rate Bolivia as a hybrid regime (EIU 2018), “partly free” (Freedom House 2018), or among the middle-of-the-pack

on a variety of specific indices (V-DEM 2018). Even if we acknowledge that the election of Evo Morales—the first indigenous president of Bolivia—was a monumental moment signaling dramatic changes to the political, economic, and social realities of Bolivia, one of the poorest and unequal societies in the Americas, we should not lose sight of the fact that the years since 2005 have also produced a Bolivian political system that does not meet the expectations of a liberal competitive democracy. Perhaps one way to think about this is that Bolivia traded an “exclusionary” form of (neoliberal) politics for a more “plurinational” but less competitive political system.

It is also very difficult to disentangle what aspects of the increasingly “authoritarian” features of Bolivia’s hybrid regime are a product of Morales’ personal overreach, and which are a byproduct of a “pure” presidential system (Centellas 2008) that combines strong presidential powers with a popularly-backed (super)majority. Still, one cannot avoid the critical dilemma challenging Bolivia’s democracy: It has become increasingly clear that Evo Morales has no intention of leaving the presidency and there are few (if any) meaningful constraints on his ability to stay in office indefinitely. It is comforting to realize that the last few years have seen a tremendous institutional strengthening, professionalization, and sophistication of the electoral court—and especially to know that the court’s leadership was willing to challenge the constitutional court’s decision to allow Morales to run for a fourth consecutive term in 2019. The problem is that confidence even in elections, along with confidence in most other institutions, is eroding. Thus, the real challenge will come if and when voters reject Morales definitively. Adam Przeworski once famously quipped that “democracy is a system in which parties lose elections” (1991: 10). Perhaps the best evidence for a consolidation of Bolivia’s post-2003 democratic system will come when MAS loses a presidential election.

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