

BOLIVIA'S "DEMOCRACY IN TRANSITION": MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS IN 2016

*Bolivia y la "democracia en transición":
más preguntas que respuestas en 2016*

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ABSTRACT

On 21 February 2016, an absolute majority of Bolivian voters (51.3%) voted against a constitutional revision that would clear the way for President Morales to assume a fourth term in office. Evaluating the municipal level change in pro-MAS vote share over previous elections, I find that the pro-government vote share declined most dramatically in traditional MAS electoral strongholds, particularly those with high concentrations of mine workers or indigenous voters. This, along with numerous other challenges to the MAS institutional hegemony, begs larger questions about the future of the MAS as a political coalition, and about Bolivia's "democracy in transition."

Key words: Bolivia, Evo Morales, February 21 constitutional referendum, social movements

RESUMEN

En el referéndum constitucional del 21 de febrero de 2016, una mayoría absoluta de bolivianos (51,3%) votaron en contra de la propuesta de que postulara el Presidente Evo Morales por una cuarta vez. Investigo a los resultados municipales de esa elección histórica, mostrando que el partido MASista perdió más en sus bastiones electorales, especialmente en aquellos municipales con concentración alta de mineros o población indígena. Ese hecho, juntamente con varios otros desafíos a la hegemonía institucional del MAS, abre nuevas cuestiones sobre la futura política del MAS como coalición política y electoral, y sobre el Estado Plurinacional como una "democracia en transición."

Palabras clave: Bolivia, Evo Morales, 21 de febrero, referéndum constitucional, movimientos sociales

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the 2016 Quality of Bolivian Democracy survey conducted by the Association of Bolivian Political Scientists, 200 Bolivian elites characterized Bolivia as a “democracy in transition” (Varnoux Garay et al. 2016). Considerable advances continue in the areas of democratic inclusion, descriptive representation and poverty alleviation, nevertheless, 2016 also witnessed new bouts of social unrest and sometimes violent protests, heated contestation regarding citizens’ rights and civil liberties, and challenges to governmental legitimacy from within existing party structures. The authors of the Quality of Democracy survey concluded that while still on the path to democratic consolidation, Bolivia’s way forward remains unclear (Varnoux Garay et al. 2016).

In the early months of 2016, President Morales and his Movement to Socialism (MAS) party made similar claims about the state of Bolivian democracy. Citing the tremendous gains achieved over their 10-year incumbency, the MAS government claimed full transformation of the Plurinational Bolivian state could only be realized if President Morales was permitted to stand for office in 2019, thereby likely extending his tenure until 2025. Less than a year after winning his third presidential election, and in the 10th year of uninterrupted MAS rule, President Morales and the MAS put in motion a constitutional referendum to ratify modifications to the 2009 constitution, to allow for continuous presidential reelection.¹ With a constitutional referendum scheduled for the first months of 2016, President Morales was confident Bolivians would support his reelection by overwhelming margins (Los Tiempos 2016b, 13 February).

What transpired was instead a watershed moment for President Morales, the MAS, and Bolivian democracy writ large. On 21 February, with 84% turnout, an absolute majority of Bolivian voters (51.3%) voted against the constitutional revision that would clear the way for President Morales’ candidacy for a fourth presidential term. This marks the first time in more than a decade that President Morales and the MAS have suffered an unequivocal electoral defeat on the national stage.² This is the first time since the collapse of the national party system and the ascension of the MAS political machine that the embattled and fragmented opposition have presented a relatively coherent and unified front.

¹ Article 168 of the 2009 Plurinational Constitution states: “The period of the mandate of the President or Vice President is five years, and they may be reelected once for a continuous term” (author’s translation). Although President Morales was elected in both 2005 and 2009, the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal ruled in 2013 that he could stand for a third term in 2014, reasoning it would only be the first time under the 2009 constitution. If cleared to stand for election in 2019, President Morales would seek a “second” (fourth) term as president, serving from 2020-2025.

² The judicial elections of 2011, in which Bolivians took to the polls to directly elect their national judicial officers, also represented a major electoral imbroglio for the MAS (Driscoll and Nelson 2012; Driscoll and Nelson 2015). A highly politicized candidate selection process, coupled with lack of information about the candidates, drove more than 60% of Bolivians to cast blank or deliberately spoiled ballots (Deheza 2012; Driscoll and Nelson 2014). These elections, and the direct election of judges more generally, have since been characterized by many, including President Morales, as a major miscalculation (Cuiza 2014; Página Siete 2014, 27 January).

The outcome of the 21 February referendum exposed the fragility of the MAS coalition, and cast doubt on the extent of support for the continued "process of change" under President Evo Morales. For these reasons and many others, 2016 brought more questions than answers about Bolivia's "democracy in transition."

In what follows, I review various facets of Bolivian political topography against which this historic national moment transpired. Throughout, I highlight various ways in which the social movements that constitute the MAS rank and file have advanced challenges to the national party leadership, which, taken together with the constitutional referendum, suggest some social movements' threats to exit the MAS electoral coalition are credible, which may prove to be a point of leverage in future intra-party negotiations. At the same time, charges of corruption and maladministration have dogged President Morales' third administration, undermining his credibility with many Bolivians, in particular those from the middle class. Moreover, governmental efforts to discredit and formally malign the free press threaten to further undermine the democratic consolidation process.

In the final section, I return to the question of the constitutional referendum, to more closely assess the microfoundations of this historic electoral loss. Evaluating the municipal level change in pro-MAS vote share over 2014, I find that the municipalities that witnessed the largest rejection of the presidential reelection, in both absolute and relative terms, were those that have been traditional MAS electoral strongholds, particularly those with high concentrations of either mine workers or indigenous voters. This begs larger questions as to the current health and future of the MAS electoral and political coalition, and the direction the MAS will take in future years. I conclude with tentative predictions for 2017.

II. 2016: A YEAR IN REVIEW

The Economy

The Bolivian economy has kept pace with global trends in recent years, reporting a respectable 3.8% expansion of the economy overall. Still, the decline in international commodity prices, including hydrocarbons and metals, contributed to a contraction in the country's exports by 19% in 2016 (IBCE 2017a). The hydrocarbon and minerals export sectors jointly declined by 24% in 2016, on top of the 2015 contractions of more than 39% and 27%, respectively (Latin American Weekly Review 2016, 5 May). Though the volume of mineral exports increased by 9.1% over 2015, a worldwide contraction of international market prices meant the realized gains in export worth only increased by 7.5% (IBCE 2017b). The steep decline in the price of oil and natural gas (from \$4.40 US per million BTU in 2014 to \$2.50 US per million BTU in 2016) has meant hydrocarbon exports constituted only 31% of the total export market (down

from 52% in 2014), with the mineral export market accounting for 43% of total exports in 2016.

The past fifteen years have witnessed impressive strides in terms of the reduction of income inequality and poverty alleviation: both moderate and extreme poverty have decreased by 22%, real minimum wages have increased by 122%, and the real average labor income has increased by just over one third (Vargas 2016, 13 January). These impressive accomplishments were made possible in large part thanks to a robust commodities market that enabled a both aggressive public investment and widespread social transfers. This dip in international commodity prices has resulted in a corresponding decline in government revenues from royalties, fees and licensing deals with foreign investors, and the government has made only modest progress in curtailing public spending in 2016. As a consequence, public debt has increased from 36% of GDP in 2015 to 40.5% of GDP in 2016, and the current account deficit has increased from 5.7% to 6.5% (Vargas 2016, 13 January). The pains of macroeconomic contraction have been felt acutely amongst those employed in mineral extraction industries, whose livelihoods appear increasingly under threat.

Society

Of the many beneficiaries of the MAS electoral and institutional hegemony, there is perhaps no greater boon than for the social movements that constitute the MAS rank and file. In much less than a generation, sectors of society who were long marginalized in the national political process have made tremendous political strides, not only in terms of their representation but also tangible improvements in the living conditions of many of their members. The MAS was founded as a coalition between three peasant unions, but has since has expanded to include indigenous social movements throughout the country, workers, miners, and a sizable portion of the middle class (Zuazo 2009, 2010). President Evo Morales, an ethnic Aymaran who first earned his fame in national politics as the secretary general of the coca-growers union, is the literal embodiment of the MAS as a political movement. A central component of the MAS political agenda has been the “de-colonization” of politics and a formal eschewing of the exclusionary political past, and the unprecedented numbers of women, union members and indigenous peoples represented throughout the national government administration are evidence of the more inclusive and broadened scope of Bolivian democracy. At the same time, others question the extent to which the social movements truly influence government policy, which has become increasingly centralized in party leaders’ hands over time (Zuazo 2010).

In their Quality of Bolivian Democracy study of 2015/2016, the Bolivian Association of Political Scientists, together with the Konrad Adenauer foundation, surveyed 200 national elites from across the political spectrum about

their perspective on the democratic institutions, content and political outcomes of Bolivian democracy.³ As to their perspective on the internal democracy of the political parties, shown in Table 1, there was surprising consensus: a strong supermajority (74% and 79%) of the surveyed elites saw little to no internal democracy within the major parties.

Table 1: Elites' perspectives on Bolivian Democracy within Political Parties and Social Movements

	None	Little	Sufficient	A Lot	DK/NR
Thinking of both the government and opposition political parties, to what extent do they promote debate and participation within their rank and file?	17	57	17	7	2
To what extent do the political parties promote pluralism and tolerance to dissenting positions by their rank and file?	22	57	14	4	3
To what extent do the social movements (neighborhood organizations, peasant confederations, indigenous peoples' unions) promote debate and participation among their members?	9	46	32	11	2
To what extent do the social movements (neighborhood organizations, peasant confederations, indigenous peoples' unions) tolerate dissenting positions from their members?	13	54	23	7	3

Percentage of elite respondents (N=200) reported.

When asked to elaborate, a large plurality of respondents (48%) painted a picture of caudillo-like party leaders, whose authority goes largely unchallenged owing to strict limitations on debate or meaningful internally democratic procedures (Varnoux Garay et al. 2016). Elites describe the social movements in a slightly better, though still pessimistic light: a larger proportion of respondents gave favorable ratings to the social movements' encouragement of followers' participation and engagement, yet an absolute majority still characterized the social movements' internal democracy as lacking. Notably, a larger proportion

³ Drawing on the opinions of a wide-ranging and ideologically diverse sample of politicians, social leaders, activists, political commentators, academics and entrepreneurs, the survey gives critical insight into the functioning and quality of Bolivian democracy from those who are working in the trenches to construct it. It is worth noting that MAS opponents are probably slightly over-represented in the sample, in spite of the survey's authors endeavors to include a wide diversity of opinion in their sample of elites. However, because disaggregated information on the respondents' occupations or party affiliation is unavailable, there is no way to tease this out decisively. For additional information, see Varnoux Garay et al. (2016).

of respondents claimed that social movements adequately promoted members' participation (43%), than those who thought that social movements encouraged tolerance of dissenting positions among members (30%). Among pessimists' (67%) reasons for expressing skepticism of the internal democracy of the social movements, a strong plurality (42%) described the organizations as fundamentally authoritarian in structure (Varnoux Garay et al. 2016).

These surveys support the impression that while democratic inclusion and the deconstruction of entrenched hierarchies have been central to the MAS political platform, the internal democracy of the MAS as a political party is lacking on the whole (Zuazo 2010). What is more, these perspectives also suggest that the social movements have been efficacious agents of political change in part because they cultivate (and enforce) militancy and discipline within their support base. In the context of the MAS political coalition, the hierarchical and militant control the social movements impose on their own members means that the confederations, unions and social organizations that constitute the MAS coalition are their own political entity, which can coherently articulate demands and political priorities. Whereas the MAS party owes its electoral successes to the repeated mobilization of voters from within the social movements, the credible threat of exit or abstentions by key MAS constituencies renders the future of the MAS electoral coalition uncertain. Repeated challenges from key coalition members, such as the miners and organized labor, as well as the results of the February referendum, show the MAS coalition to be tenuous and open to internal challenges.

Politics

In spite of the entrenched hegemonic control of Bolivia's political institutions, the MAS faces challenges from within the party, which, coupled with threats to its external credibility, pose distinct challenges to the party's political future. Beyond the constitutional referendum (discussed in detail below), numerous other political episodes reveal the party to be wrestling with considerable internal strife and increasingly damning accusations of corruption and maladministration. Clamping down on the freedom of the press in an attempt to stem the tide of dissent risks further undermining the government's broader political legitimacy, especially in the eyes of the Bolivian middle class.

Both the labor movement and the mining cooperatives continued to advance significant challenges to the third Morales administration throughout 2016 (Mendoza-Botelho 2013, 2014). Declining international prices for hydrocarbons, minerals and other raw exports have been acutely felt by workers most strongly connected to those sectors, whose members have mobilized in the streets to pressure MAS leadership for increased state intervention. President Morales initially appeased the largest workers' union, the Central Obrera Boliviana, or COB, negotiating increases to both general salaries and the national minimum

wage, however, this goodwill dissolved with the closure of the state-run textile company, Empresa Pública Nacional Estratégica de Textiles (Enatex), a move which eliminated at least 800 manufacturing jobs in the process (Latin American Weekly Review 2016, 5 May). At the close of 2016, the tense relationship between the government and the COB showed signs of a renewed rift. Days before the MAS party congress scheduled in December, COB Secretary General Guido Mitma announced his organization's staunch opposition to Morales' bid to push the issue of reelection, imploring the government to respect the results of the constitutional referendum and pushing for an explicit party vote to gauge the extent to which rank and file members supported the presidents' plans to pursue an additional candidacy (Pinto 2016, 13 December). In response, one leader of the MAS legislative delegation painted Mitma as an aberrant sectorial leader who represented only his own opinions, as opposed to those of the broader sector of workers. "There are two paths: you are either anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, and anti-neoliberal, or you are with the imperialists, you are with the colonialists," making clear the consequences for publicly challenging the MAS party elites (Alancoa 2016, 8 December, author's translation).

Yet these demands and challenges from organized labor put President Morales in direct conflict with mining cooperatives, a separate and equally militant member of the larger MAS political coalition (Mendoza-Botelho 2013).⁴ The MAS government ran afoul of the mining cooperatives with Law 823, which the Plurinational Assembly adopted in August 2016. Institutionalizing miners' rights and ability to unionize within the mining cooperatives, this represented a fundamental affront to the cooperatives' internal hierarchical structure, and signaled a distinct break with past preferential treatment by President Morales and the MAS. Staging protests that would cut off highway access to 7 of the 9 subnational departments, this row came to a violent head when deputy interior minister Rodolfo Illanes was kidnapped and beaten to death by the striking miners when he traveled to the protest sites in an attempt to negotiate a peaceful resolution. President Morales would later retaliate, rescinding via executive decree a number of legal privileges the cooperative sector once enjoyed. This was yet another high-profile example of the internal challenges the MAS faced from within in 2016.

⁴ Mining cooperatives are informal collectives of small-scale miners who excavate mineral reserves using centuries-old methods of extraction and processing, and sell what unrefined minerals they recover directly to private entities on the open market (Achtenberg 2016, 23 November). Mining cooperatives emerged as a solution to the closure of many state-run mines in the 1990s, when neoliberal economic policies shifted to favor private and predominantly foreign mining operations. Steady increases in mineral prices have transformed the internal economy of the cooperatives from a modest, collectivist approach into a powerful and coordinated economic force and social organization. While the cooperative mines produce only about 30% of the total mineral extraction, the miners represent an estimated 90% of the mining workforce, who collectively constitute a potent political force in the MAS coalition. Prior to 2016, and catering to this organic, grassroots citizens' organization, President Morales and the MAS have extended considerable benefits to the mining cooperatives in the form of favorable tax and royalty policies, turning a blind eye to environmental and labor regulatory enforcement (Achtenberg 2016, 23 November).

When not confronting internal dissent, the MAS government battled various public corruption scandals and charges of government misconduct. Having successfully avoided direct connection to the various scandals leveled against his party in 2015 (Alberti 2015), President Morales faced new allegations in 2016 in which he was implicated both directly and personally. At the heart of the controversy of *Caso Zapata* was Evo Morales' past relationship Gabriela Zapata Montaña, the local manager of a Chinese engineering company CAMC. The young and attractive ex-girlfriend of president Morales was shown to have used state resources to secure multiple direct invitation contracts to CAMC, together totaling more than \$570 million dollars, opening questions as to how she secured the managerial position and more damning accusations of illicit enrichment and influence peddling. The media quickly seized on Morales' intimate connection to the *Caso Zapata*, publicizing not only the torrid details of their courtship but their shared paternity of a child, the circumstances of whose birth and purported death remain disputed.⁵ While a MAS-dominated investigatory commission in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly formally absolved Morales of any wrong doing, Zapata's dealings with CAMC and the extent of her personal connections to the president have never been decisively substantiated.⁶ Zapata's own account of the affair and subsequent dealings has also shifted over time, and although she maintains her innocence, she was sentenced in May 2017 to 10 years in prison.

Caso Zapata claimed the most widespread attention in 2016, but other high-profile examples of corruption and maladministration further polarized public opinion regarding government transparency and trustworthiness. Days before the February referendum, a fire in the municipal building of El Alto resulted in the death of six public officials. Even worse, the arsonist admitted to having set the fire in an attempt to destroy public records of corruption from the previous administration—charges for which previous mayor was already imprisoned. In July, and amidst the government's tense negotiations with the COB over the shuttering of the state-run textile company Enatex, new allegations surfaced charging that inept, nepotistic leadership had run the company into the ground (Latin American Weekly Review 2016, 7 July). In the final months of 2016, severe drought and water shortages in La Paz and El Alto revealed the extent of the mismanagement of the cities' aquifers by the state-run water agency EPSAS (Empresa Pública Social de Agua y Saneamiento). While the cities' residents struggled through weeks of water rationing, probes of the agency's administration exposed managerial positions to have been become a common currency of political patronage, prioritizing the hiring and promotion of MAS affiliates irrespective of professional or managerial experience (Aguilar 2016, 23

⁵ President Morales acknowledged his relationship with Zapata as well as the birth of their son in February 2016 (Página Siete 2016, 5 February), yet three months later he claimed the entire ordeal to be a fabricated story advanced by the opposition to discredit him and the MAS political project (Página Siete 2016, 13 May).

⁶ In their formally registered minority report, the opposition members of the legislative commission described the investigatory process as superficial and lacking meaningful political will, claiming the MAS-affiliated members of the committee actively worked to protect the President (Muñoz Colque and Ortiz Antelo 2016).

November). Amid widespread frustration with the administrative ineptitude, nepotism and an insufficient response to what was perceived as a preventable problem, a poll conducted by periodical *Página Siete* showed that 87% of those impacted by the crisis believed the water shortages to have been preventable, with 40% faulting the national government for their lack of planning and preparedness (Chávez 2016).

In response to swirling controversies and corruption allegations, the President and MAS leadership have frequently lashed out at journalists, accusing the news media of propagating rumors and false information. Morales publicly claimed he feels personally "betrayed and abandoned" by journalists; Minister of the Presidency Juan Quintana threatened that some media organizations would "disappear," in light of their insistence on "lying" to the public, an ultimatum that was widely protested by the opposition, the Association of the National Press (ANP), as well as some members of the MAS (El Diario 2016, 4 March). In the days preceding the constitutional referendum, Senate President José Alberto Gonzales claimed independent pollsters were waging a "dirty war" on the government, for their reporting that the "Yes" and "No" campaigns were virtually tied in public opinion polls (Jaldín 2016d). Formally faulting the news media for the government's loss in the constitutional referendum, Minister of the Presidency Juan Quintana characterized the news media of a "cartel of lies," singling-out both news agencies and individual journalists as targets of governmental ire.⁷ Between January and June of 2016, a total of 40 members of the press reported receiving threats, aggressions or being physically detained in their line of work, suggesting a sharp increase in suppression of the press over previous years. Whereas the Bolivian Observatory on Human Rights recorded only 22 similar incidents in the entire year of 2015, this suggests that violent attacks on the freedom of expression and the press have increased fourfold over the previous year (Observatorio 2016). Alongside these troubling tendencies are pending formal restrictions on freedom of the press: the Telecommunications Law (N. 164) of 2011 stands to allocate 33% of broadcast licenses to the government, which threatens to shutter more than 400 independent broadcast stations in 2017.

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

The Executive

President Morales returned to office in 2015 high off the electoral win of 2014 in which 61.4% of Bolivians voted him into a third term in office. Accordingly, his

⁷ "The Cartel of Lies" would later become the name of an hour-long documentary which recasts the Caso Zapata, as well as the outcome of the referendum, as the conspiratorial fault of news media organizations who sought to intentionally mislead and evade the public (Salari 2016, 15 December).

Vice President and running-mate Álvaro García Linera also took office for the third time in 10 years, not only as a key player in the executive branch but also as the constitutional President of the National Assembly. Other stalwart MAS party faithfuls joined or moved laterally within President Morales' ministerial cabinet and related executive positions. Former union leader of Aymara decent, David Choquehuanca was reappointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs, a position he has held since 2006. Minister Luis Alberto Arce Catacora was reappointed in 2016 as Minister of the Economy and Public Finance, having previously served as the Minister of State (2006-2009). Juan Ramón Quintana was reconfirmed as the Minister of the Presidency. Former Minister of both the Presidency and the Government Carlos Romero once again assumed the position of Minister of Government. Former president of the Chamber of Deputies, Héctor Arce, was confirmed as Prosecutor General and later promoted to Minister of Justice. A noteworthy newcomer to the President's cabinet was charismatic former governor of La Paz César Cocarico, serving as Minister of Rural Development and Land. Members of President Morales' cabinet are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Ministerial Composition, 2016

	Minister(a)
International Relations	David Choquehuanca†
Presidency	Juan Ramón Quintana
Government	Carlos Romero
Defense	Reymi Ferreira
Economy and Public Finance	Luis Alberto Arce Catacora†
Planning and Development	René Gonzalo Orellana†
Hydrocarbons and Energy	Luis Alberto Sánchez Fernández†
Autonomies	Hugo Siles Núñez del Prado†
Mines and Metalurgy	Félix Cesar Navarro†
Justice	Virginia Velasco Condori†
Work, Employment and Prev. Social	Gonzalo Trigos†
Productive Development and Plural Economy	Ana Verónica Ramos Morales†
Health	Ariana Campero Nava†
Water and the Environment	Alexandra Moreira López†
Education	Roberto Ivan Aguilar Gómez†
Institutional Transparency and Fight Against Corruption	Tatiana Valdivia†
Rural Development and Land	Cesar Cocarico
Public Works, Services and Housing	Milton Claros Hinojosa†
Culture and Tourism	Marko Machicao
Communication	Marianela Paco Durán†
Sports	Tito Rolando Montañón†

Ministerial appointees, as reported in Cusicanque (2016). †Reappointed from 2015.

The Legislature

The Plurinational National Assembly consists of a bicameral legislature of 130 deputies and 36 senators, elected concurrently with presidential elections. The mixed electoral system allows for election to the lower house via both uninominal and closed-list proportional representation, with an additional 7 seats reserved for deputies of indigenous decent; representation in the Chamber's PR-tier and the Senate is fused to the vote share of the president. In the Senate, four senators are directly elected in each of the 9 subnational departments. As in every national election since 2006, the 2014 elections saw the MAS win more than an absolute majority of the bicameral legislature; with 61.4% of the national vote share, the MAS won 68% of the Chamber of Deputies (88/130 seats), and 69% of the Senate (25/36 seats). In 2016, deputy Gabriela Montaño Viaña (MAS) assumed the presidency of the Chamber, with José Alberto Gonzales Samaniego (MAS) serving as President of the Senate.

Whereas the MAS maintains supermajoritarian control of the bicameral legislature, and MA-Sista backbenchers rarely break from party lines, many view the legislature as a *de facto* extension of the executive branch. Formally, the legislature is constitutionally empowered and routinely asked to investigate, oversee and check executive action; by many accounts these mechanisms are routine and superficial (Zuazo 2010; Informe de Minoría 2016). As before, the Quality of Democracy survey is telling: respondents across professional and ideological lines overwhelmingly disagreed with notion that there exists a true separation of powers across the executive, the legislature, the judiciary and the electoral court. Specifically, 83% of respondents reported observing a strategy to concentrate and consolidate power entirely, presumably by the executive branch (Varnoux Garay et al. 2016).

The Judiciary

Since the inaugural judicial elections of 2011, the situation in the Bolivian judiciary has by all accounts gone from bad to worse. The elections were originally heralded by reformers as an opportunity to reconstitute and "democratize" the judiciary, in 2016 the judicial branch continued to be plagued by malfunction and a lack of public confidence (Driscoll and Nelson 2015). The Judicial Summit of 2016 sought to bring together various actors from the justice sector, civil society, the social movements and the academy to collaborate with the Ministry of Justice to debate and develop proposals to reform the justice system. In practice, the Ministry of Justice solicited input from various pre-summits in departments around the country before establishing the agenda for the meeting in Sucre. Held over the course of two days in June, the Summit produced a six-point agenda of priorities in the reformation of the judicial sector, including the constitutional maintenance of the direct election of judges, improving access to the justice system, improving efficiency and the speedy

resolution of trials, combatting corruption, reforming the educational training of judges and judicial professionals, and constitutionalizing life in prison for the sexual violation of minors.⁸

It is unclear the extent to which the Judicial Summit was an effective venue for dialogue and debate. The National Association of Bolivian Lawyers abandoned the Summit only hours after it began, saying the six pillars of justice reform were not open to external engagement or debate, and the Association's concerns were not being taken seriously; the judicial branch's own recommendations to prioritize judicial independence, plural justice and an increase in the justice sector's budgets also appeared to fall on deaf ears (Zolá 2016, 16 December). The opposition feared the Judicial Summit and the proposal of judicial reforms was simply a different justification to "open" the 2009 Constitution and revisit the question of presidential reelection. Little visible progress was made on the Summit's six-point plan in the months following the Sucre meeting, at the time of writing (in mid-2017) there is little evidence that any move towards implementation has yet taken place. Calling the Summit a "dead end," critics have come to view it as a missed opportunity to make meaningful and badly needed reforms (Página Siete 2016, 20 June).

The Opposition

Many of the leaders of the opposition come to the national scene based on regionally cultivated fame and political success, often rising in the ranks of local civic associations and state-level politics (Deheza 2008). In spite of their shared criticisms of President Morales and the MAS party machine, the opposition has generally failed to coalesce around a national party platform, or articulate a coherent alternative to the MAS political project. Admittedly, the MAS has not made this easy—monopolizing state financial resources to proselytize their own political agenda, while wielding the more coercive arm of the state bureaucracy to discredit and level charges against opposition leaders who represent a potent political threat. The opposition has long decried judicial persecution, claiming that the government uses the judiciary to systematically decapitate the political opposition, and 2016 was no exception (Observatorio 2016). Several leaders have fled to neighboring countries or the United States, often claiming political harassment and requesting official state asylum, though these actions have only been construed by the government as demonstrable evidence of malfeasance and culpability. Beyond their ideological

⁸ Though MAS party leaders had hoped to reform the judicial selection process to do away with the direct election of national magistrates, opposition from within the social movements of the MAS refused to concede this constitutional point (Paredes 2016). As for the other priorities for reform, external observers were especially skeptical of the constitutionalization of penalties for the violation of minors. First, this penalty is already clearly stipulated in statutory law; and second, not only would making this reform require "opening" the constitution, but there was no evidence that this priority had been raised organically in the departmental pre-summits. Rather, it appeared to have arrived to the Judicial Summit as a pre-defined priority of the MAS government (Los Tiempos 2016, 13 June).

differences and geographically concentrated bases of support, several features of the electoral system inhibit opposition coordination and undermine the opposition's institutional representation in the national political arena. The nature of the two-round electoral system by which presidents are elected incentivizes both candidate entry and sincere voting on the part of voters (Cox 1999), and the opposition has consistently split its vote across candidates in every presidential election since 2005. The majoritarian rules that govern the Bolivian system exacerbate the opposition's coordination problem, as two conditions must be met before a second round of elections are convened for the presidential race: the first placed candidate's vote share must not exceed 50%, and the second-place candidate must be within 10 percentage points of the first candidate's vote share. President Morales has consistently surpassed the absolute majority threshold, with the second highest-ranking candidates only earning about 25% of the national vote share.

The fusion of the presidential vote share to the PR-tier of the Chamber of Deputies as well as the Senate has spillover effects in the Plurinational Assembly, as well. Under previous electoral rules, at least one-third of the Senate seats would be held by minority parties, but the increase in the number of Senate seats from three to four and the proportional allocation of Senate seats in accordance with the President's vote share has consistently ensured MAS control of the upper chamber with more than 70% of the Senate's seats. The compensatory structure of the mixed electoral system has the effect of over-allocating seats to parties relative to their proportion of the vote when their electoral base is strongly geographically concentrated. Accordingly, as the MAS has consistently won many if not all of the single-member districts in the Andean departments, it has secured more than 70% of the seat share with roughly 63% of the vote. In regions where the opposition has been geographically concentrated, their fragmentation across districts has tended to undercut their numeric representation. Finally, the single-member majoritarian electoral rules by which a majority of deputies are elected may also undermine the opposition's need to cultivate a broad, nationally-resonant party platform, as candidates are incentivized to cultivate a geographically concentrated, and perhaps even personalized support base to win or maintain their incumbency.

Beyond its constitutional implications, the results of the February referendum served an important informational signal which has ignited and unified this fractious coalition. The referendum made it clear that, when presented with a single, coherent alternative, an absolute majority of Bolivian voters denied President Morales the opportunity to stand for office again. This revelation is telling unto itself, and is much needed encouragement for a long-embattled opposition. Prominent opposition leaders, including two former presidents and a former vice-president, have since publicly affirmed their intention to collaborate in the future in defense of "democracy and justice in Bolivia" (Quiroga et al. 2017), and the opposition is now mounting campaigns to overtly protest the upcoming judicial elections, scheduled for December 2017.

IV. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES AND ELECTIONS: THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM OF 2016

Without question, the most important institutional change that occurred in 2016 was the one that never happened: President Morales and the MAS tried, and failed, to change the constitution to permit presidential reelection via constitutional referendum. Faced with the prospect of a term-limited leader, the MAS laid groundwork in the months following his 2015 inauguration for a constitutional reform to allow for presidential reelection. In May of 2015, the 8th MAS/IPSP National Congress approved a motion to plan a constitutional referendum in support of the change, and the supermajority MAS control of the bicameral Plurinational Legislative Assembly greatly facilitated the passage of the proposal through the first stage of this constitutional reform. By October, the path had been cleared by both the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) and the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal for the constitutional revision to be put to a national vote. The text of the referendum ballot asked:

Are you in agreement with the reform of Article 168 of the Constitution that states that the president or vice president of the Bolivian state can be reelected twice consecutively?⁹

Table 3 reports the vote share for the “Yes” and the “No” vote from the 21 February referendum, as well as the percentage of votes cast as blank and null. As a point of historical reference, the vote share totals of the MAS/IPSP and all other parties (classified as “opposition”) from the 2014 national elections are also shown. Beyond the national results, the Table reports the results for all nine subnational departments, as well as the major metropolitan areas therein. The final column in Table 3 reports the percentage change between the MAS vote share of 2014, and the “Yes” vote share in the February referendum of 2016.

Table 3: Official Results of February 21 Constitutional Referendum, 9 departments and major metropolitan areas

District	Yes	No	Blank/ Null	MAS/ IPSP	Opposi- tion	Percentage
	2016	2016	2014	2014	2014	Change†
Bolivia	48.7	51.3	4.7	61.1	38.9	-12.4
La Paz	55.8	44.2	4.8	68.9	31.1	-13.1
Nuestra Señora de La Paz	41.9	58.1	3.3	52.1	47.9	-10.2
El Alto	58.1	41.9	5.3	72.0	28.0	-13.9

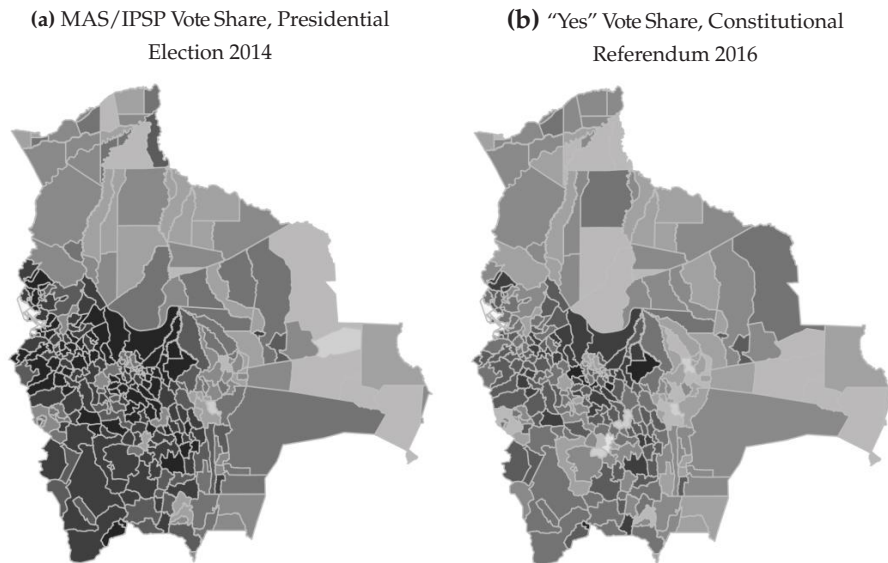
⁹ An annex clarified that 2015-2020 would count as Morales’ first term, while the second term would be from 2020-2025.

District	Yes	No	Blank/ Null	MAS/ IPSP	Opposi- tion	Percentage
	2016	2016	2014	2014	2014	Change†
Oruro	52.0	48.0	5.3	66.4	33.6	-14.4
Oruro	44.1	55.9	4.8	57.5	42.5	-13.5
Potosí	46.7	53.3	6.9	69.5	30.5	-22.7
Potosí	14.1	85.8	3.8	42.3	57.6	-28.2
Cochabamba	54.9	45.1	4.3	66.6	33.3	-11.7
Cochabamba	41.9	58.1	3.3	51.0	48.9	-9.1
Chuquisaca	44.8	55.2	5.4	63.3	36.6	-18.6
Sucre	29.3	70.6	4.7	50.4	49.6	-21.0
Santa Cruz	39.7	60.3	4.6	48.9	51.0	-9.3
Sta. Cruz de la Sierra	34.4	65.6	4.2	43.6	56.6	-9.4
Beni	38.4	61.6	3.5	43.6	56.3	-5.2
Trinidad	34.4	65.6	3.2	36.1	63.8	-1.6
Pando	43.8	56.2	4.5	52.1	47.9	-8.2
Cobija	38.9	61.1	4.0	47.3	52.7	-8.3
Tarija	40.1	59.9	4.3	51.7	48.3	-11.5
Tarija	30.4	69.6	3.9	40.6	59.4	-10.3

Data taken from the Tribunal Superior Electoral (TSE) official tally of the February referendum 2016, and the 2014 national elections. Vote share calculated as the percentage of the vote cast for candidates, excluding valid ballots cast as null or blank. "Opposition" includes all non-MAS/IPSP presidential candidates. Abstentions and international voters not reported. † Percent change in pro-government (MAS) vote share relative to 2014 presidential elections.

Table 3 shows that an absolute majority of Bolivian who cast a valid vote voted against the constitutional referendum. Though 48.7% voted in favor of the change, 51.3% of voters voted against. Overall, this represents a 12.4% decrease in the pro-MAS vote share relative to the 2014 national elections that took place just 16 months earlier. Scanning the subnational results, there appears to be considerable variation both across departments and between urban and rural environments. With the exception of the city of El Alto, metropolitan areas of the departments were more strongly aligned with the "No" vote, with rural municipalities more often voting in favor of the change. Strikingly, the largest shift in vote share over the 2014 election came not from opposition strongholds, but from departments which have consistently voted in favor of President Morales and the MAS, such as Potosí, and, to a lesser extent, Chuquisaca.

Figure 1: Geographic Distribution of Pro-MAS Vote, 2014 Presidential Election and 2016 Constitutional Referendum



Source: Data taken from the Tribunal Superior Electoral (TSE) official tally of the February referendum 2016, and the 2014 national elections. Vote share calculated as a percentage of valid ballots, excluding valid votes cast as null or blank.

Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of the pro-MAS vote share in the 2014 presidential elections and 2016 constitutional referendum, respectively. Vote share is measured at the level of the municipality, with a higher proportion of the pro-government vote share being shaded in darker grey. The electoral map in 2014 (panel (a)) looks similar to those since President Morales' rise to power in 2005: the MAS and President Morales have enjoyed overwhelming support in the Andean departments (including La Paz, Cochabamba, Potosí, Oruro and Chuquisaca), while the Eastern departments of the 'Media Luna' have consistently been home to the fragmented and fractious political opposition. As panel (b) shows, the pro-MAS vote has diminished considerably throughout its traditional strongholds of the Andean departments of La Paz, with the most dramatic decline witnessed in the department of Potosí. The MAS carried the Andean-west departments with an average of 85% of the vote in 2014, this average slipped to a still strong but notably diminished 70% in favor of the constitutional referendum. Table 3 shows that in addition to considerable declines in the largest metropolitan areas of the country, there were substantial swings outside the major cities, as well.

Explanations for this electoral upset have been widespread and varied, though generally speculative. Spokespeople for the government claimed voters were confused by the wording of the question, as well as the technical design of

the ballot. They have also suggested that social media had seized upon the rumors and slander of the *Caso Zapata*, tipping public opinion against President Morales (Luján 2016, 20 February; Jaldín 2016b, 26 February). President Morales shifted the blame to local governments, claiming the voters rebelled against MAS mayors who had recently been charged with corruption (Jaldín 2016a). Members of the traditional opposition parties claimed this was a victory for the separation of powers and a demonstrable show of the Bolivian middle class' intolerance for government corruption, limitations on the press and the lack of governmental transparency (Jaldín 2016b; Los Tiempos 2016a, 13 February). It is objectively true that this electoral campaign united the opposition in ways previous elections never by providing the chance to campaign around a single and coherent alternative, rather than dividing their vote across multiple alternatives.

Yet another class of explanations came from within the MAS rank and file, with many MAS- aligned social movements and unions suggesting that the MAS national leadership had failed to meaningfully engage with grassroots leaders. Casting the referendum as a political project advanced exclusively by a narrow cadre of political elites, leaders of two major peasant unions claimed their own efforts and priorities had been sidelined within the party, and that the loss of the referendum was the fault of the national party leaders, not the party rank and file (Página Siete 2016, 3 March; Página Siete 2016a, 25 February). Speaking of the electoral loss and the role of the MAS party leaders, one leader was quoted as saying:

It's their responsibility we lost; at the moment they (the ministers) are working for the president, they're not working for us ... We want to remind our brother President Evo Morales that he listen to the social organizations, and then he will have an electoral triumph in the next elections, because if he's going to continue to coordinate with the ministers, this is going to be the result (Página Siete 2016, 3 March; Página Siete 2016a, 25 February, author's translation).

Despite these many and varied hypotheses as to why Bolivians collectively voted "No," thorough analyses of this electoral upset remain scarce. Although aggregate reports of the vote results were disseminated widely throughout the press, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) no longer publishes the electoral results on its website, complicating efforts to identify the possible causes for this shift in public sentiment.¹⁰ Taking this fact as a point of my departure, I provide a deeper look into the correlates of this dramatic change in the Bolivian electoral landscape.

¹⁰ Replication data for the following analyses, as well as disaggregated vote share data, are available from the author's website.

Multivariate Analyses

The dependent variable is the *Pro-MAS Vote Share Change*, which documents the percentage shift in pro-MAS votes between the 2014 presidential elections and the 2016 February constitutional referendum. The variable takes a negative value if the pro-MAS vote share declined between 2014 and 2016, and a positive value if the pro-MAS vote share increased. It is continuous and normally distributed, with a mean of -0.12 , which corresponds to the average decrease in pro-MAS vote share across all municipalities. The municipality of Yocalla, in the department of Potosí, saw the largest negative value of -0.41 , while the department of San Ignacio of Santa Cruz saw the highest positive value of 0.25 .

To identify municipalities that have traditionally supported the MAS in the past, I include three different indicators meant to capture different origins of government support. The first is the proportion of the municipality who voted for President Morales in the 2014 presidential elections, *MAS Vote Share, 2014* (TSE 2016). Not only is the most recent election with which we might draw comparisons, it is also an election in which voters had the option of voting directly for President Morales himself. Second, I include a measure of support for the MAS party more generally by including an indicator of whether the municipality elected a mayor from the MAS party in the 2010 municipal elections (*MAS Mayor, 2010*) (Tribunal Supremo Electoral 2012). This gives a sense of support for the MAS party that might be differentiated from personalist support for Evo Morales, and is also an indication of support for the local party infrastructure, independent of support for the national party platform. Finally, I include an indicator for all municipalities where an absolute majority of voters supported the MAS in the 2006 elections to the Constituent Assembly, providing a long view of the municipality's historical support for the MAS political movement on the whole: *MAS Vote Share, 2006* (Corte Nacional Electoral 2006). To account for regional variation in traditional support for the MAS, I include an indicator for all municipalities in the *Media Luna*, in the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Tarija and Pando.

Lacking information on union membership density or social movement participation, I collected several indicators that act as proxies for the strength of two main social movements, which have been critical players in the MAS coalition. To identify municipalities with a high concentration of members of the mining cooperatives (FENCOMIN), I located as many municipalities as possible that are home to a major *Mine*, using the U.S. Geological Survey Minerals Yearbook (Wacaster 2013). The Yearbook provides an annual description of the structure of the mineral industry, as well as the location and capacity of main facilities. This process identified 22 municipalities with major mining operations, providing a conservative estimate of the mining cooperatives' scope of influence in the country.¹¹ Next, I identified municipalities with larger

¹¹ This estimate is conservative because many of the mining operations listed in the Yearbook could not be definitively located.

proportions of *Indigenous* voters, drawing on information in the 2001 Bolivian census (INE 2002).¹² The indicator *Indigenous* ranges from 0 to 1, and reflects the proportion of residents above the age of four whose first language was an indigenous language (Quechua, Aymara, Guaraní or OtherNative).

To evaluate the hypothesis of a rural/urban divide, I include *Urban* is the percentage of the urban population in the municipality, which is roughly uniformly distributed between 0 and 100, although nearly 10% of all municipalities have been classified as rural (i.e. *Urban*=0). Not only have metropolitan areas have been less consistently supportive of the MAS political machine, but urban dwellers would have been much more likely to have been exposed to campaign activities, as well as the flurry of scandal-mongering surrounding the *Caso Zapata*.

Because the government has broadly faulted social media and the controversy surrounding the *Caso Zapata* for the referendum's defeat, I include a number of variables that might capture residents' exposure to the scandal. Citizens would have been more likely to have been exposed to the calumny and media storm if they had access to *Television* or the *Internet*, both of the variables indicate the percentage of homes with either a television or internet access, respectively; *Television* ranges from 2% to 94%, with a mean of approximately 40%; internet access is much more circumscribed, with a mean of 2% and a maximum of only 23%.

Finally, I include a number of controls meant to capture information on the relative prosperity and living conditions in each municipality. I include the percentage of households with *Running Water*, taken from the 2012 Household Census. This variable ranges from 0.2% to 94%, with a mean close to 50%. To evaluate residents' average educational attainment, I include the indicator *Primary Education*, which is the proportion of residents 19 or older who have only completed a primary education.

Before interpreting the results of the multivariate analysis, an important caveat deserves recognition: by inferring individual-level behavior from aggregate voting records and municipal level statistics we risk committing an ecological fallacy. As such, these cross-sectional, municipal-level correlations should be interpreted with due caution. The bottom line is that municipalities don't vote—people vote, and lacking information on individual-level voting behavior it is impossible to know exactly why they did so. Second, though an absolute majority of Bolivian voters declined the opportunity to change the constitution to allow the immediate reelection of presidents, we cannot infer that this was an outright rejection of the MAS nor of President Morales, and the information required to disentangle these claims is unavailable. With these stipulations laid plain, the analysis is still suggestive.

¹² The publicly available 2012 Bolivian census did not include information on residents' ethnicity or native tongue.

Table 4: OLS Regression of change in municipal pro-MAS vote share, 2014 presidential elections to 2016 constitutional referendum

Pro-MAS Vote Share Change from 2014	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Mine	-0.056* (0.00)	-0.053* (0.00)	-0.056* (0.00)	-0.055* (0.00)
Indigenous	-0.077* (0.00)	-0.039 (0.05)	-0.078* (0.00)	-0.073* (0.00)
Media Luna	0.045* (0.00)	0.017 (0.21)	0.044* (0.00)	0.024 (0.07)
Urban	-0.0067 (0.75)	-0.015 (0.46)	-0.0063 (0.77)	-0.0090 (0.67)
Internet	0.28 (0.10)	0.12 (0.46)	0.28 (0.10)	0.27 (0.10)
Television	-0.090* (0.01)	-0.080* (0.01)	-0.092* (0.01)	-0.092* (0.00)
Running Water	-0.032 (0.14)	-0.028 (0.19)	-0.032 (0.14)	-0.0076 (0.73)
Primary Education	0.00061 (0.26)	0.0013* (0.02)	0.00066 (0.23)	0.00072 (0.18)
MAS vote share 2014		-0.19* (0.00)		
MAS mayor 2010			-0.0059 (0.49)	
MAS Const. Assembly 2006				-0.048* (0.00)
Constant	-0.076* (0.00)	0.030 (0.39)	-0.072* (0.01)	0.047 (0.07)
Observations	315	315	313	315
R ²	0.31	0.35	0.31	0.34

t statistics in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows the results of an Ordinary Least Squares regression of vote share change on all of the aforementioned explanatory covariates.¹³ Across all models, the negatively signed coefficients on the previous MAS vote share variables indicate that the “Yes” campaign to ensure the reelection of President Morales took the biggest electoral hit in the districts where MAS had previously been the

¹³ It is no surprise that the largest coefficient of these is the most recent electoral contest of 2014, as our outcome variable (pro-MAS vote share change) is a direct function thereof.

strongest. In three of the top five electorally volatile municipalities, including Yocalla, Uyuni and Chaqui of Potosí, upwards of 80% of voters voted in favor of Morales in 2014, though only an average of 43% voted to allow a renewal of Morales' mandate in the referendum of 2016. On the contrary, the coefficients for the *Media Luna* are statistically significant across most of the models, albeit in a *positive* direction. This implies that voters in the areas of the country thought to be most strongly anti-MAS and most consistently against President Morales, actually voted in *favor* of the amendment.

Further, there were two constituencies that have been strongly ensconced in the MAS political machine: the miners' union and the indigenous communities, who appeared to have mobilized voters *against* Morales' reelection in the February constitutional referendum. Mining communities—those municipalities that contain a large *Mine*—witnessed an average decline in pro-MAS vote share by nearly 6% points, which is considerably larger than the country-wide average. This effect is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level across all model specifications, even when controlling for pro-MAS vote share in previous contests. This implies that even if it were the case that some subset of previously MAS voters rejected the proposition of the reelection campaign such that it would result in a 19% decline in vote share across all previously MAS districts, the vote share in the mining community rejected this proposal by an additional 5% margin. An effect of similar magnitude is found in strongly *Indigenous* communities, however this coefficient is not statistically different from zero in at least one of the models.

Although the aggregate swings across the 9 departmental capitals shown in Table 3 suggest a possible rural/urban divide, the proportion of the *Urban* population in a municipality had no statistically significant effect. Far from an aberration of disaffected urban voters, support for the "No" position appears to have been widespread throughout the country. President Morales described the delivery of the vote in rural and mining communities as a "blood pact," but it would seem that the community leaders declined to deliver their votes this time around (Carrasco 2016).

Also of note are several covariates which appear to have statistically indiscernible effects. Despite the fact that the official line of the government has faulted salacious rumors spread by social media for the loss of the constitutional referendum, so much so that MAS legislators introduced legislation to censure social media accounts in the future (Jaldín 2016c; Página Siete 2016b, 25 February), the consistently positive coefficients across the models suggests that communities with strong *Internet* penetration may have actually been *more* likely to have voted with the MAS, though this relationship is in no case statistically different from zero. The percentage of households with a *Television* correlates negatively with the pro-MAS "Yes" vote share, though it is difficult to interpret what this coefficient means. Insofar as a television is a consumer good that might reasonably differentiate voters on the basis of socioeconomic status, we might take this as an indication that municipalities with a higher

concentration of socioeconomically disadvantaged voters were more supportive of the “Yes” vote. On the other hand, more widespread access to televisions may have meant higher exposure to the scandal surrounding the *Caso Zapata*, resulting in a disaffection for yet more allegations of government malfeasance and maladministration.

V. QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

As a party, the MAS started and ended 2016 with the same effective commitment to Bolivia’s “democracy in transition.” President Evo Morales has continued to serve as the leader of the party, and will likely stand as the party’s candidate in 2019. In the MAS Party Congress held in December of 2016, undeterred by the outcome of the February referendum, the MAS party directorate outlined four ways forward to ensure a fourth candidacy for Morales in 2019. The first would involve staging a second constitutional referendum, provided a sufficient number of citizens would sign a petition to permit it. As of early 2017, members of the coca-growers union in President Morales’ home department of Cochabamba had signaled their intent to start collecting signatures, though the constitutionality of this approach is dubious at best. Second, because the MAS enjoys a supermajority in the Plurinational Assembly, it could simply rewrite the constitution—an option which is well within its institutional power, though it would surely draw criticism from domestic and international audiences alike. A third proposition would have President Morales resign shortly before the end of his term, so as to sidestep the constitutional language mandating “consecutive” reelection. Finally, the MAS could simply contest the constitutionality of the reelection ban at the Constitutional Tribunal, claiming the formal imposition of term limits violates a basic human right to seek election (*Latin American Weekly Review* 2016, 22 December).¹⁴ As such, in spite of the absolute majority of voters who expressed unwillingness to support a fourth presidential term, President Morales and his MAS supporters appear wholly undeterred. The state sponsored campaign to rally public opinion on this front is well underway, complete with its own social media presence and hashtag (#21FDiaDeLaMentira), which characterizes the February referendum as a “Day of Lies” —a conspiracy orchestrated by the opposition with the support of the United States to pervert the will of the Bolivian people and prevent the reelection of President Evo Morales.

The opposition has predictably cried foul on this plan, and continues to lobby every domestic and international audience who will pay them any heed. The

¹⁴ Beyond these “democratic” possibilities, several other possibilities circulated. One involved advancing an alternative presidential candidate, with Morales joining as the vice-presidential running mate, only to have the president resign once elected to office so that Morales might take his place. While this maneuver is within the technical bounds of the constitution, there has appeared no clear consensus on which alternative candidate could possibly run as president—and who the social movements would actually support in the elections—to make that particular plan feasible.

February referendum provided a critical moment of coordinated opposition action and a chance to definitively unite behind a common banner of resistance to the MAS electoral and institutional hegemony. But from here the next battles are uphill: the opposition has been unable to articulate a coherent national alternative to the MAS political agenda, without which winning the presidency is simply a mathematical impossibility. If the fragmented opposition is to capitalize on the electoral success of 2016, they must first overcome their differences and propose a meaningful alternative.

As for the MAS, the tight hierarchical control within the coalition may have contributed to its electoral and political potency until now, but 2016 has exposed the limits of this logic. Strong party leadership may serve to discipline an unruly coalition, the censuring of internal dissent may have deprived the party of credible successors, or a new generation of political entrepreneurs who might lead the party into the next phase of political change. The MAS has been electorally impenetrable for a decade, yet the various challenges of 2016 serve as a reminder that this party is not a monolith, but a coalition of social movements with their own (sometimes conflicting) political priorities. How or if MAS will oversee the next phase of transition and change remains an open question for 2017 and years to come.

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