

Bolivia's 'Democracy in Transition': More Questions than Answers in 2016

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Abstract

On February 21, 2016, an absolute majority of Bolivians (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—in particular those with high concentration 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."

En el referendun 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."

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I INTRODUCTION

In the survey “Quality of Bolivian Democracy 2016” conducted by the Association of Bolivian Political Scientists, 200 Bolivian elites characterized Bolivian democracy as one of a “democracy in transition.” Though considerable advances continue in the areas of democratic inclusion, descriptive representation and poverty alleviation, 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 author of the “Quality of Democracy” survey concluded that while still on the path to democratic consolidation, Bolivia’s way forward remains unclear (“Quality of Democracy” 2016).

In the early months of 2016, President Morales and his Movement to Socialism (MAS) party made a 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 (“Evo cierra campaña” 2016).

What instead transpired was a watershed moment for President Morales, the MAS, and Bolivian democracy writ large. On February 21, with 84% turnout, an absolute majority of Bolivians (51.3%) voted against the constitutional revision that would clear the way for President Morales’ candidacy for a fourth presidential term. This marks first time in more than a decade that President Morales and the MAS has 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 has presented a relatively coherent and unified front. Though the electoral hegemony MAS has long seemed impenetrable, the outcome of the February 21 referendum exposed the fragility of the MAS coalition, and threw into question the

¹Article 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.” Though 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.

²The 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 & Nelson 2012; Driscoll & Nelson 2015). A highly politicized candidate selection process, coupled with lack of information of the candidates drove more than 60% of Bolivians to cast blank or deliberately spoiled ballots (Deheza 2012; Driscoll & Nelson 2014). These elections, and the direct election of judges more generally, has since been characterized by many, including President Morales, as a major miscalculation (Cuiza 2014; “Ministra de Justicia” 2014).

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 which constitute the MAS rank and file advanced challenges to the national party leadership, which taken together with the constitutional referendum suggest some social movements’ threat to exit the MAS electoral coalition is 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 further threatens 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 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, in particular those with high concentration 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 in what direction the MAS will move in future years. I conclude with tentative reflections for 2017.

II 2016: A YEAR IN REVIEW

A *The Economy*

Though the Bolivian economy kept pace with recent years in terms of growth, reporting a respectable 3.8% expansion of the economy overall, the decline in international commodity prices, including hydrocarbons and metals, contributed to a contraction in the country’s exports by 19% (IBCE 2017a). The hydrocarbons and minerals exports sectors jointly declined 24% in 2016, this is on top of the already more than 39% and 27% contraction of the hydrocarbons and minerals export markets in 2015 (“Morales and COB” 2016). Though the volume of minerals exports increased by 9.1% over 2015, a worldwide contraction in their 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 hydrocarbons exports constituted only 31% of the total export market (down from 52% in 2014), with the minerals 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 more than a third (Vargas 2016). These impressive accomplishments were made possible in large thanks to a robust commodities market which enabled a both aggressive public investment and widespread social transfers. Though the dip in international commodity prices has also meant a decline in government revenues from royalties, fees and licensing deals with foreign investors, 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). The pains of macroeconomic contraction have been felt acutely amongst those most strongly ensconced in mineral extraction industries, who see their livelihoods in decline and increasingly under threat.

B 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 qualitative 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 is evidence of a 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 been 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 on their perspective on the democratic institutions, content and political outcomes of Bolivian democracy.³ As to their perspective on the internal democracy of

³Drawing 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

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

	None	Little	Sufficient	Alot	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 within their members?	9	46	32	11	2
To what extent do the social movements (neighborhood organizations, peasant confederations, indigenous peoples' unions) tolerance to dissenting positions by their members?	13	54	23	7	3

Percentage of elite respondents (N=200) reported.

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. 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 ("Quality of Democracy" 2016). Elites describe the social movements in a slightly better, though still pessimistic light: though a plurality of respondents questions the social movements' internal democracy, a larger proportion of respondents gave favorable ratings to the social movements' encouragement of followers' participation and engagement. Notably, there is a stronger proportion of respondents who claimed the social movements adequately promoted members' participation (43%), than those who thought the 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 social movements' organizations as fundamentally authoritarian in structure ("Quality of Democracy" 2016).

These surveys support the impression that though democratic inclusion, pluralism and the deconstruction of entrenched hierarchies has 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,

quality of Bolivian democracy from those who are working in the trenches to construct it. Though the authors of the survey endeavored to include a wide diversity of opinion in their sample of elites, including a cross-section of politicians and administrators, from it is worth noting that likely MAS opponents are probably slightly over represented in their sample. Whereas disaggregated information on the respondents' occupations or party affiliation is unavailable, there is no way to tease this out decisively. For additional information, see "Quality of Bolivian Democracy" 2016.

these perspectives also suggest that it is not only by numerical presence that the social movements have been efficacious agents of political change, but also by cultivating (and enforcing) militancy and discipline within their followers and members. 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, who can coherently articulate demands for their own 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 in potential uncertainty. 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.

C Politics

Though the MAS maintains an entrenched hegemonic control of Bolivia's political institutions, challenges from within the party, coupled with threats to its external credibility, pose distinct challenges to the party's political future. Though the constitutional referendum (discussed in detail below) stands out as a watershed political moment of 2016, numerous other political episodes reveal the party to be wrestling with considerable internal challenges 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 amongst those 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. Though the contraction of the international exports market effectively tied the government's hands in this respect, President Morales initially appeased the largest workers' union, the Central Obrera Boliviana, or COB, negotiating a 6% general salary increase and a 9% increase in the national minimum wage for the year ("Morales and the COB" 2016). This goodwill dissolved with the announcement that the state run textile company, Empresa Pública Nacional Estratégica de Textiles (Enatex), would be closed, eliminating at least 800 manufacturing jobs in the process. 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, secretary general of the COB 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 supported the presidents' plans to pursue an additional candidacy (Pinto 2016). 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).

Yet these demands and challenges by 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 awry 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 to attempt to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the miners' strikes. President Morales would later retaliate, rescinding via executive decree a number of legal privileges the cooperatives sector once enjoyed, though this was yet another high profile example of the internal challenges the MAS faced from within in 2016.

When not confronting internal dissent, the MAS government battled various public corruption scandals and charges of government misconduct. Though President Morales avoided direct connection to the various scandals leveled against his party in 2015, most prominently the revealed corruption of the Fondo Indígena (Alberti 2015), allegations raised in 2016 implicated President Morales 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

⁴Mining cooperatives are informal collectives of small scale miners who excavate mineral reserves using century-old methods of extraction and processing, and sell what unrefined minerals they recover directly to private entities on the open market (Achtenberg 2016). Mining cooperatives emerged as a solution to the closure of many state-run mines in the 1990's, when neoliberal economic policies shifted to favor private, and predominantly foreign, mining operations. Steady increases in mineral prices has 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 have constituted a potent political force in the MAS political 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 royalties policy, turning a blind eye in terms of environmental and labor regulatory enforcement (Achtenberg 2016).

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 still remain under dispute.⁵ Though 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 telling of the affair and subsequent dealings has also shifted over time, and though she maintains her innocence, she was sentenced in May 2017 to 10 years in prison.

Though *Caso Zapata* claimed the most widespread attention in 2016, 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, made worse when the arsonist admitted to have 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 negotiation 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 ("Morales challenged" 2016). In the final months of 2016, severe drought and water shortages in La Paz and El Alto made clear the severe 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). 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 the journalists and free press, accusing the news media of

⁵Though President Morales acknowledged his relationship with Zapata as well as the birth of their son in February 2016 (Evo reconoce 2016), just 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 ("Evo Dice" 2016).

⁶In their formally registered minority report, the opposition members of the legislative commission described the investigatory process as superficial and lacking in meaningful political will, and that the MAS-affiliated members of the committee actively worked to protect the President.

propagating rumors and false information. Morales publicly claimed he feels personally “betrayed and abandoned” by journalists; The 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 which was widely protested by the opposition, the Association of the National Press (ANP) as well as some members of the MAS (“Parliamentarios objectan amenazas” 2016). In the days preceding the constitutional referendum, the Senate President José Alberto Gonzales claimed independent pollsters were waging a “dirty war” on the government, for their reporting that the “Yes” and the “No” 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 has increased four fold over the previous year (Observatorio 2016). Alongside these troubling tendencies are upcoming 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

A *The Executive*

President Morales came 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 vice-President and running mate Álvaro García Linera also took office for a 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

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 (“Cartel of Lies” 2016).

Chamber of Deputies, Héctor Arce was confirmed as Prosecutor General, and later promoted to Minister of Justice. Noted 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 the President Morales’ cabinet are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Ministerial Composition, 2016

	Minister(a)
International Relations	David Choquehuanca†
the 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 Fernandez†
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 Montaña †

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

B The Legislature

The Plurinational National Assembly consists of a bicameral legislature of 130 deputies, and 36 senators, whose election runs concurrent 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 elections 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 Montaña 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 defacto extension of executive branch. Though the legislature is constitutionally empowered and routinely asked to investigate, oversee and check executive action, as in the case of the *Caso Zapata*, by many accounts these mechanisms are routine and superficial (Zuazo 2010; Informe de Minoria 2016). As before, the Quality of Democracy elites survey is telling: respondents across professional and ideological lines overwhelmingly disagreed with the question as to whether there exists a true separation of powers across the executive, the legislature, the judiciary and the electoral court (“Quality of Democracy” 2016). Specifically, 83% of respondents reported observing a strategy to concentrate and consolidate power entirely, presumably by the executive branch.

C The Judiciary

Since the inaugural judicial elections of 2011, the situation in the Bolivian judiciary has by all accounts gone from bad to worse. Though the elections were originally heralded by reformers as an opportunity to reconstitute and “democratize” the judiciary, the judicial branch continues to be plagued by malfunction and 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 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, combat corruption, reforming the educational training of judges and judicial professional, while 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 dialog 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). The opposition feared the Judicial Summit and the proposal of judicial reforms was simply a different justification to “open” the

⁸Though MAS party leaders hoped to reform 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, there was no evidence that this priority had been raised organically in the departmental pre-summits, but rather had arrived to the Judicial Summit as a pre-defined priority of the MAS government (“Propuestas y Conclusiones” 2016).

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. In fact, though the Summit established clear guidelines for the implementation of Summit's recommendations, as of this writing in 2017 there is little evidence that any move towards implementation had take place. Calling the Summit a "dead end," critics viewed the Summit as a missed opportunity to make meaningful and badly needed reforms ("Cumbre de Justicia" 2016).

D 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 (Deheza 2008). Though they share common criticisms of President Morales and the MAS party machine, since the collapse of the traditional party system 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 either the United States or neighboring countries, 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 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 very 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 exacerbates 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. Though the candidates and opposition parties have changed over time, the second highest vote share candidate has only ever earned about 25% of the national vote, while President Morales has consistently surpassed the absolute majority threshold.

The fusion of the presidential vote share to the PR-tier Chamber of Deputies as well as to the Senate has spillover effects in the Plurinational Assembly as well. Though the previous electoral rules ensured that at least 1/3 of the Senate seats would be occupied by minority parties, 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 personalistic, base of support to win or maintain their incumbencies as Deputies.

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 clear that, when presented with a single coherent alternative, an absolute majority denied President Morales the opportunity to stand again for office. This revelation is telling unto itself, and is much needed encouragement to a long embattled opposition. Prominent opposition leaders, including two former presidents and a former vice-president publicly affirming their intention to collaborate in the future, in defense of "democracy and justice in Bolivia" (Declaración Conjunta 2017), and the opposition is now mounting campaigns to overtly protest the upcoming judicial elections, scheduled for October 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 re-election via constitutional referendum. Though the 2014 presidential elections returned Morales to a third presidential term with a comfortable 61.4% of the national vote, the prohibition on presidential reelection spelled out in the 2009 constitution suggested Morales' third administration would be his last. 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 re-election. 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 of 2015, the path had been cleared by both the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) and the Plurinational Constitutional

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

Percentage		Yes 2016	No 2016	Blank/Null 2016	MAS/IPSP 2014	Opposition 2014	Percentage 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
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.

Tribunal for the constitutional revision to be put to a national vote. The text of the referendum ballot queried:

“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 February 21 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

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

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 makes clear an absolute majority of Bolivians voted against the constitutional referendum. Though 48.7% voted in favor of the change, 51.3% of voters voted against. Overall, this is represented a –12.4% decrease in the pro-MAS vote share, as the 2014 national elections took place just 16 months before. Scanning the subnational results, there appeared 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

(a) MAS/IPSP Vote Share, Presidential Election 2014

(b) “Yes” Vote Share, Constitutional Referendum 2016

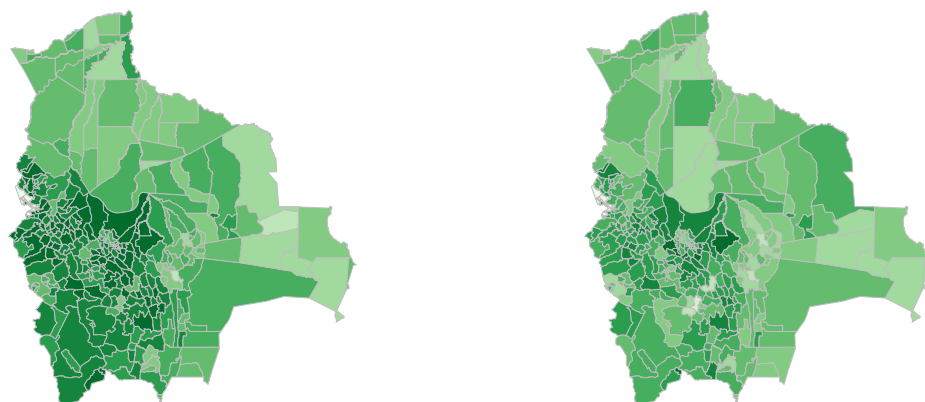


Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of the pro-MAS vote share in the 2014 presidential elections and 2016 constitutional referendum, respectively. Vote share is measured at the level of the municipality, with a higher proportion of the pro-government vote share being shaded in darker grey. The 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) of Figure 1 shows, the pro-MAS vote diminished considerably throughout its traditional strongholds of the Andean departments of La Paz, with the most dramatic decline witnessed in the department of Potosí. Though 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. Though Table 3 makes clear there were considerable declines in the largest metropolitan areas of the country, it is easy to see considerable 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, and that social media had seized upon the rumors and slander of the *Caso Zapata*, tipping public opinion against President Morales (Luján 2016; Jaldín 2016b). 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 that the Bolivian middle class' intolerance for government corruption, limitations on the press or lack of government transparency (Jaldín 2016b; "Economía y Corupcción" 2016). It is objectively true that this electoral campaign united the opposition in ways previous elections never had, in that the opposition had 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 the grassroots leaders of the social movements and unions. 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 it was the loss of the referendum was the fault of the national party leaders, not the party rank and file ("Colonizadores culpan" 2016; "Organizaciones dicen" 2016). 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," ("Colonizadores culpan" 2016; "Organizaciones dicen" 2016).

Despite these many and varied hypotheses as to why Bolivians collectively voted "No," thorough analyses of this electoral upset have been scarce. Though aggregate reports of the vote results were disseminated widely throughout the press, 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 this dramatic change in the Bolivian electoral landscape.

A Multivariate Analyses

The outcome 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 *Pro-MAS Vote Share Change* takes a negative value if the vote share declined between 2014, and a positive value if the pro-MAS vote share increased, and takes the intuitive interpretation of the proportion of vote the MAS conceded. It is continuous and normally distributed, with a mean of $-.12$, which corresponds to the average decrease in pro-MAS vote share across all municipalities. The municipality of Yocalla, in the department of Potosí takes its most negative value of $-.41$, while the department of San Ignacio of Santa Cruz is the empirical maximum of $.25$.

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 to 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 if the municipality elected a mayor from the MAS party in the 2010 municipal elections (*MAS Mayor, 2010*) (Atlas Electoral 2010). Not only does this give a sense of support for the MAS party that might be differentiated from personalist support for Evo Morales, but it 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.

Though information on union membership density or social movement engagement is not available, I collected several indicators to proxy for the strength of two main social movements who 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 which are home to a major *Mine*, using the U.S. Geological Survey Minerals Yearbook

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

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

To evaluate the hypothesis of a rural/urban divide, I include *Urban* is the percentage of the urban population in the municipality, which roughly uniformly distributed between 0 to 100, though nearly 10% of all municipalities being 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*.

Whereas 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. Though the scandal and subsequent fallout was widely publicized and inescapable, citizens would have been more likely to have been exposed to the calumny and media storm if they had access to *Television* or access to the *Internet*. Both of the variables are the percentage of homes with either a television or internet access; *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 .2% to 94% with a mean approximating 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

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

¹²The 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. * $p < 0.05$

to know how exactly they did so. Second, though an absolute majority of Bolivians declined the opportunity to change the constitution to allow the immediate reelection of presidents, though we cannot infer this was an outright rejection of the MAS nor of President Morales, and the information required to disentangle these claims is unavailable. With said stipulations laid plain, the analysis is still suggestive.

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 strongest. Though the structure of the election finally gave the embattled opposition an opportunity to coalesce around a single alternative to the MAS, the largest gains to the “No” vote came not from opposition strongholds, but in traditionally MAS electoral bastions, throughout Oruro and Potosí. 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, though 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 reelection for a fourth time.

Further, there were two constituencies that have been strongly ensconced in the MAS political machine—both 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 with a large *Mine* located therein—witnessed an average decline in pro-MAS vote share by nearly 6% points, considerably larger than the country overall. 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 an additional 5% more. An effect of similar magnitude is found in strongly *Indigenous* communities, though this coefficient is not statistically different from zero in at least one of the models.

Though the aggregate swings across the 9 departmental capitals shown in Table 3 suggest a possible rural/urban divide, the proportion of *Urban* population in a municipality had no statisti-

¹³It 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.

cally significant effect. Far from an aberration of disaffected urban voters, support for the “No” position appears to have been widespread throughout the country. Though President Morales described the delivery of the vote in rural and mining communities as a “blood pact,” 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. Though the official line of the government has faulted salacious rumors spread by social media for the loss of the constitutional referendum, so much that MAS legislators introduced legislation to censure social media accounts in the future (Jaldín 2016c; “Redes Sociales” 2016), the consistently positive coefficients across the models suggests that communities with strong *Internet* penetration may have 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 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 would continue to serve as the leader of the party, and would stand as the party’s candidate in 2019. In the MAS Party Congress held in December of 2016, and ostensibly 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 for said request. 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, whereas the MAS enjoys a supermajoritarian control of the Plurinational Assembly, it could simply rewrite the constitution, an option which is well within its institutional power, though 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 re-election ban to the Constitutional Tribunal, claiming the formal imposition of term limits

violates a basic human right to seek election (“Bending the Rules” 2016).¹⁴ As such, in spite of the absolute majority 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 (#21FDaDeLaMentira), which characterizes the February referendum as a “Day of Lies,” a conspiracy orchestrated by the opposition with support of the United States, to prevent the will of the Bolivian people and the reelection of President Evo Morales.

The opposition has predictably cried foul to this plan, and continues to lobby every domestic and international audience who will pay them any heed. The February referendum provided a critical moment of coordinated opposition action, 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 they are to capitalize on the electoral success of 2016, they must overcome their differences, to propose a meaningful alternative.

As for the MAS, the tight hierarchical control within the MAS may have contributed to its electoral and political potency, 2016 has exposed the limits of this logic. Though strong party leadership might keep an unruly coalition in line, 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. Though the MAS has been for a decade electorally impenetrable, 2016 serves as a reminder that this party is not a monolith, but a coalition of social movements with their own, and sometimes conflicting, political priorities. How or if it will oversee the next phase of transition and change, remains an open question for 2017.

¹⁴Beyond 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. Though also 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.

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