

March 2010

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BOLIVIA

Capital
(constitutional, judicial) Sucre, 19°2's 65°15'w
(administrative) La Paz, 16°29's 68°8'w
Largest city Santa Cruz de la Sierra,
17°48's 63°10'w

Official languages Spanish and 36 native languages

Government
– President Evo Morales
– Vice President Álvaro García Linera

Republic

Evo Morales
Álvaro García Linera

Independence from Spain
6 August, 1825

Political Parties (elections 2009)
Governing party
Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) 88

Opposition parties
Plan Progreso para Bolivia (PPB) 37
Frente de Unidad Nacional (UN) 3
Alianza Social AS 2

Total: 130

Total votes 4,859,440
Registered voters 5,139,554

State of Democracy Bolivia

Since 2006, when Evo Morales of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) became President, Bolivia has witnessed political turbulence and social unrest but also rising hope for more justice and equality for the indigenous population. Due to the rise of the MAS, the traditional parties have lost their grip on the political system. Mr Morales came to power with an agenda of reform, including a new constitution, to give excluded population groups a voice in the political process.

Constitution

As the MAS clashed with the dethroned political establishment, the constitution-making process led to political confrontation and violence until, in October 2008, the government and the opposition came to an agreement on the text of the new constitution. In January 2009, the constitution was approved by a referendum.

Electoral Law

The new constitution focuses on issues of regional autonomy, the distribution of national resources and the balance of power. In light of the latter, a new Electoral Law was proposed in 2009. After weeks of disagreement in the Plurinational Assembly and the Senate, parliament passed a new Electoral Law in April, which was immediately signed by President Morales. A certain number of seats (less than proposed by the MAS but more than the opposition desired) is now reserved for the indigenous candidates. Also, women and men are to be represented equally in the list of candidates.

Elections and prognosis

Political life in Bolivia has been strongly defined by the national elections held on 6 December 2009, which took place without the kind of violent confrontations witnessed in previous years. Mr Morales increased his electoral support to 64%, up from 54% of the votes in 2005. Moreover, the results also show that support for Morales grew in regions where opposition to the MAS is strong, such as in Santa Cruz and Tarija. Now that the MAS enjoys a two-thirds majority in both the Plurinational Assembly and the Senate, it will face no difficulties in having its proposals approved. Local elections for the Departments and Municipalities will be held on 4 April 2010. On both levels, people will directly vote for the head of the Executive and for the Assembly. After these elections, a clear picture of the political landscape for the coming five years will be defined.

Autonomous regions

A major issue in Bolivia is the political tension within and between the different regions, especially in the provinces of Santa Cruz and Tarija. On the one hand the central government has to count on the support of all the departments in order to implement public policies. On the other hand, each departmental government has to represent the interests of its citizens, which vary greatly in Bolivia, due to social economic diversity per region.

NIMD Bolivia Programme

NIMD has been working in Bolivia since 2002. NIMD's partner in the country is the *Fundación Boliviana para la Democracia Multipartidaria* (fBDM). The general objective of the programme is to promote and support change in Bolivia's political culture – from confrontation to dialogue. fBDM approaches this by promoting dialogue between all political parties and movements in fBDM itself as well as by including disenfranchised groups in the political process. The programme also aims to strengthen the relationship between political parties, movements and citizens.

Electoral Law

During 2009, an important achievement was the elaboration and approval of the new Electoral Law. In this process, fBDM supported the direct participation of civil society in systemising the different draft proposals for the law. Moreover, it facilitated a dialogue between the different political parties and movements in order to reach a compromise on the content of the law. Furthermore, in preparation for the national elections, fBDM also made a contribution to communicating the electoral manifestos of all political organisations to the public by distributing inserts in the national newspaper and broadcasting radio programmes through Asbora, a network of sixty radio stations.

Parties and Movements

Traditional political parties have lost their credentials and new parties and political movements have been formed. It is very important that these new political entities build their organisations in a transparent way. Party members should be able to hold their representatives in the Plurinational Assembly accountable. Politicians may need training to develop party programmes and draft proposals for reform. Institutional and programmatic strengthening of political parties and movements are therefore key focus areas of NIMD's programme in Bolivia.

Autonomous Regions

NIMD's programme has expanded to the regional level, in order to act upon the different political voices particular to the regions. Much effort is being put into promoting political dialogue, so that confrontation and potentially separatism can be avoided. Towards this end, fBDM has now founded sub-offices in Santa Cruz and Tarija.



In 2009 fBDM played a major role in achieving multiparty consensus for the Electoral Law, just as it did in 2008, when the foundation helped the government and the opposition achieve agreement on the text of the new Bolivian Constitution. fBDM was able to contribute to these agreements by bringing together moderates from both sides (government and opposition) and facilitating a process of consensus building.

Stakeholders

1. Programme Partner

Fundación Boliviana para la Democracia Multipartidaria (fBDM)

2. Key national partners

- Corte Nacional Electoral (CNE, National Electoral Council)
- Asociación Boliviana de Radiodifusoras (ASBORA, radio stations organisation)
- Universidad Nacional

3. Key international partners

- Royal Netherlands Embassy
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung – Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales (FES-ILDIS)
- Andres Bello International Institute
- European Union (EU)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF)

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