



BOLIVIA INFORMATION FORUM

BIF Election Special

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The landslide victory for Evo Morales and the MAS in Sunday's general election clears the way for implementation of Bolivia's new constitution.

On the basis of preliminary, fast-count, returns for the whole country, Morales won 62% of the vote. In the legislative elections that took place at the same time, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) appears to have come close to its target of two-thirds of the seats in the new Plurinational Legislative Assembly, with at least 24 seats in the 36-seat Senate and some 84 seats in the 130-seat Chamber of Deputies.

The result was a major setback for Morales' two main right-wing opponents. Manfred Reyes Villa, the former prefect of Cochabamba (de-selected in a recall referendum last year) -- managed only 27% of the vote. Samuel Doria Medina, a

wealthy businessman, won only 6%. The opposition parties will no longer have the votes in parliament to block government legislation in the way they have been doing over the last four years.

Morales's victory compares with the 54% he won in the 2005 elections, themselves considered an unprecedented landslide in modern Bolivian politics. He won 67% in the recall referendum in August 2008, which saw the de-selection of two opposition prefects (Reyes Villa in Cochabamba and Jose Luis Paredes in La Paz).

Although it was clear from the beginning of the re-election campaign that Morales would win another five-year term, the scale of the victory in the Legislative Assembly was less obvious. Many observers had thought that the MAS's goal of winning two-thirds of the total seats was

Department	% vote in favour of Morales in the national elections December 6 2009*	% vote in favour of Morales in the August 2008 recall referendum	% vote in favour of Morales in the national elections in December 2005
Nationwide	National: 62.5% (Urban: 56.1% Rural: 72.5%)	67.41%	53.74%
Chuquisaca/Sucre	53.1%	53.88%	54.17%
La Paz	78.5%	83.27%	66.63%
Cochabamba	67.6%	70.90%	64.84%
Oruro	77.3%	82.99%	62.58%
Potosí	74.9%	84.87%	57.80%
Tarija	48.6%	49.83%	31.55%
Santa Cruz	40.1%	40.75%	33.17%
Beni	37%	43.72%	16.50%
Pando	45.4%	52.50%	20.86%
Votes abroad	69%	--	--

*Note that figures for December 2009 are based on rapid count at end of election day (source: ATB); these are likely to change somewhat.

over-ambitious. Although the number of seats may fall slightly short of two-thirds, the party significantly increased its presence in the new Assembly.

Regional dimension

The victory for the MAS was especially notable in the eastern part of the country, where the right-wing opposition had sought to break away from La Paz in 2007 and 2008. In Santa Cruz, the MAS won just over 40% of the votes, compared with 33% in 2005. It therefore picks up two of the four Senate seats in the department, the same as Reyes Villa's Plan Progreso para Bolivia (PPD). The MAS topped the poll in Tarija with just under 49% of the vote (compared with 31% in 2005), achieving another two Senate seats there. In Pando and Beni, the PPD won most votes, but support for the MAS was substantially higher than in 2005.

The extent of MAS support in the so-called 'Media Luna' lowland departments destroys the idea that the country is somehow evenly divided politically between 'east' and 'west', lowlands and highlands. The inroads into the opposition heartlands were made easier by the division of the opposition into two main camps and the poor electoral campaign of both these parties. In Santa Cruz, the violence perpetrated by the far-right in September 2008 clearly created rifts within the local elites, as did the alleged involvement of prominent figures from the local civic committee in a terrorist plot that sought to spearhead secession from the rest of Bolivia.

Looking forward

The election will now probably give way to changes in the cabinet as Morales prepares to officially take office again in January. There are also major changes in the make-up of the legislature. Many of those voted in, particularly in the Chamber of Deputies, are people little known in national politics, mostly representatives of social movements. Their election will help fortify links between the government and social movements, albeit at the expense of experience in the legislature.

The government's major objective over the coming months will be the detailed implementation of the new constitution, ratified by referendum in January this year. There are 411 clauses many of which will require legislative regulation to make them effective. This will involve a mass of new laws, notably in such areas as reform of the judiciary and the creation of new structures of autonomous administration at the local level. In the case of the latter, this will mean defining the roles and responsibilities of four layers of autonomous administration: departmental, municipal, regional and indigenous.

The issues of autonomies will be a key factor in the elections, next April, for departmental prefects/governors and municipal councils. The opposition parties will hope to regain the political initiative in these, winning at least the prefectures in the 'Media Luna'. The results from Sunday's elections place this in doubt, particularly in the southern department of Tarija, where most of Bolivia's natural gas is located. Previously a presidential appointment, the post of prefect/governor has become highly important in the relations between central government and the departments. In Sunday's elections, voters also approved regimes of autonomy in the five departments that voted 'no' in a referendum held in 2006, allowing the whole country to proceed with the process of decentralisation. In the gas-producing Chaco area people voted for an autonomous regional government.

Free and fair

Sunday's elections were generally deemed free and fair by various groups, including the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union (EU) and the US Carter Center. The re-registration of voters and the issue of biometric voting cards as ID -- seen by many as being impossible in the time available -- proved to be a great success, removing doubts (voiced strongly by the opposition) as to the quality of the electoral roll. In the end more than 5 million voters were registered. Bolivians living abroad -- specifically in Argentina, Brazil, Spain and the United States -- voted for the first time. Participation nationwide was extremely high, with only 6% of those able to vote failing to do so.