



## Bolivia Country Update: July 2006

*Andean updates produced monthly by the Americas Society and Council of the Americas (AS/COA)*

### Topics in this Issue

- Constituent Assembly Elections
- Referendum on Regional Autonomy

Over 3,000,000 Bolivians turned out to vote in the July 2, 2006 **Constituent Assembly elections**. The 255 representatives selected, representing over 25 parties and groupings, will convene on August 6 in Sucre for what is expected to be a year-long process to rewrite the country's constitution. President Evo Morales sees this historic process as a needed pillar in fighting discrimination against the country's indigenous majority. With no party or alliance winning the necessary two-thirds representation necessary to push through their agenda, the drafting process will require compromise and negotiation.

Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), Morales' political coalition, witnessed the greatest levels of popular support, receiving 1,322,656 votes or 50.72% of total votes cast. MAS will be allocated 134 seats in the Assembly, giving it an absolute majority. Together with its Free Bolivia Movement (MBL) allies, Morales' coalition will be in control of 145 of the 255 total seats. Although the MAS-MBL coalition will represent the Constituent Assembly's largest grouping, it falls short of the 170 seats necessary to control the drafting process. Compared with the December 2005 elections, MAS support in the July elections fell approximately 3 percent. Bolivia's second and third largest political alliances, Social Democratic Power (*Podemos*) and National Unity Front (UN), saw their support declining by about 13% and 0.6%, respectively. Single department parties and small regional groups benefited the most from the decline in vote-share of the large parties. As a result of the elections, 14 minor parties will be represented in the Constituent Assembly.

### July 2 Constituent Assembly Election Results: Top five political coalitions

Coalition	Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) - Excluding Free Bolivia Movement (MBL)	Social Democratic Power (Podemos)	National Unity Front (UN)	Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR-A3)	National Concertation (CN)
Percentage	50.722%	15.327%	7.198%	3.902%	3.576%
Number of votes	1,322,656	399,668	187,706	101,753	93,248

Source: Bolivian National Electoral Court. <http://www.cne.org.bo/sirenacomp06/wfrmdepnaltotales.aspx>

**Referendum on regional autonomy.** Despite a majority (57%) of the electorate voting against regional autonomy in the referendum held at the same time as the Constituent Assembly Elections, it is still uncertain if the Constituent Assembly will permit those departments that voted in favor of greater autonomy to establish their own status under the new constitution. Specifically, the referendum had asked if "the Constituent Assembly should be given the mandate to establish a regime for departmental autonomy... in those departments in which the referendum has majority." As defined in the referendum, autonomy would mean that authorities would "be elected directly by their citizens and receive from the National State... normative administrative responsibilities and economic and financial resources."

With four of the nine Bolivian departments voting in favor of autonomy, a debate has been opened as to whether results should be recognized in individual departments, despite the "no" majority nationwide. Departments supporting autonomy include Santa Cruz (71.1% in favor) in the east, Tarija (60.8%) in the south, and Ben (73.8%)

and Pando (57.7%) in the north. President Morales has stated that he will urge MAS Constituent Assembly representatives to heed the will of departments that voted in favor of autonomy, but it still unclear what degree of departmental autonomy would be granted.

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