

This section complements the “*The 2019 Elections in Bolivia*” chapter authored by Sebastian Urioste and published in DABÈNE, Olivier (ed.). *Latin America’s Pendular Politics: Electoral Cycles and Alternations*. Springer Nature, 2023. Located on footnote number 2 (page 225), it aims at understanding the antecedents comprised between 1982 and 2005, the features of the “Pacted democracy” period, and the recurrence of unfinished presidential terms since the return to democracy in Bolivia are available online (OPALC’s website).

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I. Antecedents for understanding the post-election crisis of 2019

As noted in the introduction to this book, during the 2000s, many constitutional reforms in Latin America allowed for an extension of successive terms in office, in a favorable economic context that seemed to guarantee the re-election of incumbents. However, the case of Evo Morales' third attempt at continuous re-election in Bolivia was characterized by very low electoral integrity and provoked protests of such magnitude that, in a single day, the incumbent president proposed to cancel the elections (while recomposing the body in charge of organizing the elections) and, finally, to resign from office. This was followed by the resignation of the other five authorities in the line of succession provided for in the 2009 constitution, such a decision led to a power vacuum that allowed senator Yanine Añez to proclaim herself president of the Plurinational State.

To understand the significance of these events and to appreciate whether they can be analyzed in terms of an alternation between "progressivism" and "conservatism", our analysis requires, first, broadening the temporal horizon of the 2017-2019 cycle, as some aspects of this period seem to fit with common variables of Bolivian political life of the last 40 years, while others are unusual.

The fall of the Popular Democratic Union and "pacted democracy"

To return to the recent history of Bolivia, the interruption of a presidential term of office by social mobilizations was one of the most important events in the transition to democracy. In 1982 the *Junta* of Commanders of the Armed Forces called the congress elected in 1980 into session: Hernán Siles Suazo (leader of the "leftist" *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*, MNR) and Jaime Paz Zamora (candidate of the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*, MIR) were elected president and vice-president of the republic based on a coalition of parties, the Popular Democratic Union (UDP). The UDP also included the Communist Party and intended to pursue an anti-inflationary policy without calling state capitalism into question. The democratic transition had just taken place, but it quickly led to a major social and political crisis that caused the presidency to falter. According to the C.O.B. (*Central Obrera Boliviana*, a powerful revolutionary organization that federated all the country's trade unions), the democratic process was the victory of the working class; it moved from a concerted opposition to an open strategy of destabilization as it found little response to its demands. Undermined by divisions within the cabinet and outvoted in parliament, the president soon found himself exhausted and abandoned. In 1984, a

mediation by the Catholic Church led to a decision by the main parliamentary parties and the government to shorten Siles' term of office by one year and to call new elections. In March 1985, during one of the longest general strikes in Bolivian history, the C.O.B. interpreted this agreement between the government and parliament as a capitulation by the UDP in favor of capitalism. The first government of the return to democracy responded by deploying the army in the streets, which ended the strike. It is worth noting that in order to ensure that Jaime Paz Zamora stepped down from the vice-presidency he was allowed to run again as a presidential candidate - which was theoretically forbidden by the 1967 Constitution - as by resigning he had not fulfilled his mandate¹.

The results of the June 1985 election gave victory to former military dictator Hugo Banzer, with 32.83% of the vote, followed by Victor Paz, with 30.36%. The electorate in favor of the two parties considered as "right-wing" at the time exceeded 60%, although neither candidate was willing to step aside to allow the other to be elected to Congress. The M.I.R. vote in favor of Paz Estenssoro broke the tie and allowed him to be inaugurated as president. This event marked the first time in Bolivia's history that the presidency was alternated between opposing political parties without violence. In fact, Paz Estenssoro's third presidency ushered in what has been called "pacted democracy" (1985-2003), a period in which the fragmentation of the vote and the lack of an absolute majority in presidential elections would lead to the formation of coalitions between political parties to form governments with a foothold in Parliament. Coalitions that carried out the closure or privatization of public enterprises and the liberalization of the labor market. In fact, as a party system was consolidated, guaranteed by a non-partisan electoral court, capable of establishing legislative agreements on packages of economic and constitutional reforms, C.O.B.'s capacity to mobilize was reduced, often contained by states of exception.

The end of "pacted democracy"

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the challenge to the Washington consensus that was beginning to sweep across Latin America also reached Bolivia. Associated with the structural reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, the "pacted democracy" was singularly challenged when, in 2000, social mobilizations against the "neoliberal model" forced President Banzer to terminate a contract for the management of water in the city of Cochabamba with a multinational company. The state of siege he had declared in 2000 had multiplied social protest and could not be fully implemented after the mutiny of the national police. Although he had the broadest parliamentary coalition since the return to democracy, Banzer was still weakened and, suffering from cancer, resigned in 2001 and was replaced by his vice-president, Jorge Quiroga, who completed his term. Nevertheless, the very legitimacy of the party system was progressively challenged by the return of politics to the streets, linked to the demands of a variety of "social movements" that were emancipating themselves from the C.O.B. and challenging both Bolivia's integration into the market economy, the republican regime inherited from independence, and even state's monopoly of legitimate violence.

It was in these circumstances that Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (president between 1993 and 1997) was re-elected to parliament by a coalition of parties in 2002, even though he had only obtained 20.8% of the vote and was followed by Evo Morales (19.4%). The latter was running for president for the first time under the MAS banner and ran a campaign based on a thunderous anti-imperialist discourse. In February

¹ H. Siles Suazo, Law N° 682, December 14, 1984.

2003, a "People's General Headquarters " composed by the C.O.B. and many other social and trade union organizations demanded the resignation of the president within 48 hours after he ordered the army to suppress a police mutiny amidst social unrest over a tax increase. In October of that year, opposition to negotiations to export gas to the United States via Chile spearheaded nationwide mobilizations and roadblocks that quickly escalated to demands for the President's resignation. On October 10, Congressman Evo Morales proposed a presidential succession between the president and the vice president, Carlos Mesa². On October 13, Mesa renounced his participation in the government, but did not resign. As the days went by, the repression increased and the protests became more intense³. The coalition of political parties that had supported the government cracked. At dawn on October 17, the army contingents decided, without the government's approval, to let a caravan of 58 trucks loaded with mine workers pass through; this caravan headed for the city of La Paz and joined the demonstrators who were filling San Francisco Square, near the presidential palace⁴. At the end of the afternoon, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada presented his resignation in writing before leaving the city and the country. A few hours later, Carlos Mesa was sworn in as President by the Congress and began to complete the presidential mandate, without forming a government or structuring a majority in parliament with the participation of political parties.

The forced departure of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada led to a return to the demands of a form of economic nationalism that the new government could not fully integrate, despite having called a referendum on hydrocarbons⁵. The nationalization of gas became a demand shared by many sectors mobilized in the streets and by the MAS in Parliament. Weakened and without a social base or a parliamentary majority that he could mobilize, Carlos Mesa presented his resignation several times, without it being accepted by Congress. The Congress finally did so in June 2005. However, neither Horando Vaca Díez nor Mario Cossío, respectively presidents of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, could succeed Mesa as the constitution provided: both had belonged to Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada's coalition, and the city of Sucre, where Parliament was sitting at the time, was under siege by mining and peasant unions. Cornered, they renounced to assume the presidency of the republic. In this context, in accordance with the 1967 Constitution, Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé, President of the Supreme Court of Justice and fourth in line of succession, was invested as Head of State. He assumed the tasks of providing a transitional government and organizing new general elections without waiting for the end of the presidential term or the legislature, scheduled for 2007. On July 6, Congress promptly amended the constitution to allow for these elections⁶, and the President issued a decree the same day⁷. As we shall see, these elections allowed Evo Morales to come to power.

This historical review is pivotal to identify and understand a phenomenon that has occurred in a cyclical fashion since the return to democracy in 1982. Indeed, apart from the first fifteen years of "pacted democracy" (1985-2001) and the fourteen years of Evo Morales' three continuous presidential terms (2005-2019), since the end of the cycle of military dictatorships, Bolivia has experienced several crises in which elected

² « Para salvar el país: Evo Morales propone Carlos Mesa Presidente », ANF, October 10, 2003.

³ Boris Miranda Espinoza establishes the number of civilian victims killed by the Army at 67 people. See : B. Miranda, *La última tarde del adiós*. Ediciones Ventarrón, 2013, p. 187.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 183-186.

⁵ S. Romero Ballivián, "Análisis de la elección presidencial de 2005 en Bolivia." *América Latina Hoy* 43, 2006, pp. 38-39.

⁶ E. Rodríguez Veltzé, Law N° 3089, July 6, 2005.

⁷ E. Rodríguez Veltzé, Supreme Decree N° 28228, July 6, 2005.

presidents did not finish their terms. It should be noted that on these occasions, neither civilians nor the military took over public institutions by force (notably the Government Palace) nor deposed public authorities using armed violence. Moreover, the governments that were immediately formed were neither one-person nor collegial (such as military *juntas*). Parliaments remained open and the constitution were neither suspended nor limited by "statutes" or "revolutionary mandates" that characterized the military regimes of the 1970s. However, the circumstances and outcomes of premature termination or forced resignation can be quite different.

In the case of premature ends, as illustrated by the cases of Hernán Siles Suazo in 1984, a president's term can be cut short with his consent once he finds himself without allies in Parliament, without a supportive cabinet and when street pressure becomes unbearable. Another variation is the presidency of Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé, who constitutionally succeeded Carlos Mesa once the presidents of the upper and lower houses were forced to step down, illustrating a willingness to carry out a transitional government until early elections are held. It is worth noting that in both historical cases, the announcement of new elections (2005) and some of the permitted candidacies (1985) involved at least free interpretations of the Constitution to allow for a way out of the crisis.

In the case of forced resignations, as exemplified by the case of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in 2003, a President can be led to resign from office and then abandon the territory, under the pressure of mobilizations in the streets, while his governmental and parliamentary coalition is faltering and he finds himself without the support of forces of law and order. It is relevant to note that, in this historical case, the President was abandoned by the Army, which was reluctant to continue repressing social mobilizations. However, in contrast to the end of the mandate mentioned, in this case the constitutional succession respected the procedures established by the constitution.

Three other cases remain to be examined, which are not easy to categorize: Hernán Siles Suazo's requests to resign in 1985 (after he decided not to finish his term), the prevention of Horlando Vaca Díez and Mario Cossío from taking office in 2005, and the resignation of Hugo Banzer in 2001. The first case highlights that shortening a term in office is not necessarily the most consensual solution to a political impasse, especially when it does not correspond to the strategies of some of the most mobilized civil society organizations, which are aiming for an immediate resignation. This issue of battle of wills is reiterated in the second case, where a constitutional succession was obstructed by actors conspiring against the parties related to the "pacted democracy". Finally, the third reveals that a strong majority in Parliament and a mandate to call for elections cannot compensate for a loss of legitimacy and capacity to govern.

We invite readers to keep these examples of *precluded presidencies* in mind, as they will help us understand the repetitive and unprecedented aspects of Evo Morales' resignation in October 2019. It should be noted that presidents who are forced to shorten their term of office under pressure from social mobilizations can be just as much in favor of economic nationalism as they champion free market economy. From a comparative historical perspective, rather than alternations based on a peaceful competition that would allow oscillation between "left" and "right" governments, the two great cycles that characterized Bolivia until the election of Evo Morales - first the transition from a state that consolidated the nationalized public sector to one that proceeded with privatization, and then the return to state intervention in the economy

- began with shortened terms and forced resignations. In sum, from a temporal point of view, the theoretical framework proposed by this book applies so far: because of the erosion of the president's authority, the strength of congress and, above all, the mobilization of public opinion, alternations in Bolivia have already occurred in a way that was not fully electoral.