

Democracy and Party Organization in Contemporary Bolivia

Paper presented at the 2019 Congress of the American Political Science Association

Washington, DC
August 2019

Santiago Anria, Dickinson College

Jennifer Cyr, University of Arizona

DRAFT PAPER: Please do not cite without permission

Introduction

In April 2015, Edgar Patana, incumbent mayor of El Alto, Bolivia, and politician of the country's dominant political party, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS), lost his bid for re-election in a city that had previously been a MAS stronghold. At that time, the MAS also lost mayoral contests in other important cities, as well as governorships in departments generally considered "easy" for the party. Though the party remains strong, the 2015 election was a major setback after a decade of dominance in the country (Albro 2015).

Shortly after, in early 2016, Morales narrowly lost a referendum that would have changed the country's constitution to let him run again in 2019. For the party in power, there was a fork in the road: The MAS could opt to find a new presidential candidate, taking steps toward de-personalization, or look for new—legally questionable—ways to enable Morales to re-run. Blaming the media for the unfavorable results, it opted to keep Morales as its candidate. It petitioned the country's Plurinational Constitutional Court to remove term limits, and won. The issue is far from trivial: another re-election can open the door to further the personalization and abuses of power that have taken place since Morales assumed the presidency (Madrid 2012). Given Morales' popularity and the weakness and disunity of the opposition, his chances of winning in a free and fair election remain high—even as discontent toward him and his government grows.

Democracy in Bolivia, as these two paragraphs suggest, is packed with tensions. On the one hand, elections remain largely competitive. Indeed, in some local and regional contests—even in MAS strongholds and key electoral districts—the dominant party has begun to lose elections. On the other, Morales has moved to strengthen the presidency and his own dominance over national government, and has treated opponents and the press with raw hostility. This

juxtaposition of elections with the personalization (and abuse) of power has led some to conclude that Bolivia's regime, like the other "Bolivarian" or "populist" regimes in contemporary Latin America—especially those of Venezuela, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, has become competitive authoritarian (Levitsky and Loxton 2013; Weyland 2013; Sánchez-Sibony 2013; Mayorga 2017).

As the pages below explain, we think this characterization goes too far. Closer to Cameron's (2018) interpretation of regime configurations in the Andes, we think that present-day Bolivia is best described as a democracy with strong deficits. It has experienced deterioration with respect to horizontal checks and balances on presidential authority and democratic contestation at the national level. The country has also, however, seen robust improvements with respect to the inclusion and participation of previously marginalized social groups. Since Morales assumed power in 2006, Bolivia has experienced deep social and political change—a massive reconfiguration of the political order and institutions. Moreover, there are mechanisms of accountability that provide countervailing bottom-up correctives to concentrated, top-down executive authority. In short, while the weakness of institutional checks and balances on presidential authority is real and concerning, inclusion and accountability appear robust.

What can explain this paradox? We suggest that dynamics internal to the MAS enable power concentration, on the one hand, while also keeping that power in check. Specifically, the party's loose bureaucratic structure allows the social movements that underpin the party to operate with independence, with few constraints. The party's loose structure has strengthened the political clout of sponsoring and allied social movements in party decision-making. As a result, since early on, movements have: exerted influence over the party leadership, including Morales; limited their room for maneuver; and held them accountable. Paradoxically, as the predominance of the MAS set the stage for the centralization of power around Evo Morales, it also put into

place mechanisms to push back on those centralizing tendencies. This finding challenges expectations in the existing literature, which tends to argue that weak party institutionalization provides leadership with considerable, unchecked capacity to exercise authority (see, e.g., Levitsky 2003). While the MAS may lack the formal institutional capacity to curb Morales' centralizing tendencies, its weak bureaucratic structures nonetheless encouraged the development of *social* accountability structures that can act as a check on concentrated presidential authority.

The strong connections between the party and its social movement bases, as well as the latter's capacity to mobilize autonomously even with the party in office, had the additional effect of keeping political elites responsive to societal demands. Indeed, Bolivia under the MAS experienced a critical shift in domestic power relations. Groups linked to the MAS, especially those that were previously on the margins of social and political life, obtained a greater say in determining who gets what, when, and how, by gaining representation in elected and appointed positions—and they have shifted policy into a more redistributive direction (Anria 2016; 2018; Wolff 2018; Silva 2018). This shift toward more inclusive and participatory form of democracy, one with high levels of participation and no systemic differences across social groups (à la Huber, Rueschemeyer, and Stephens 1997), constituted an exceptional change in a society characterized by deep ethnic divisions and exclusion.

To understand the effect of these internal organizational dynamics on the broader regime, we turn to Dahl's (1971) classic two-dimensional conceptualization of polyarchy. We recall that democracies (or polyarchies) are not just constituted by those who attain power and how they govern. They are also shaped via modes of participation. We use the Bolivian case to signal that these two dimensions—contestation and participation—operate independently of each other. Bolivia might be moving away from full polyarchy on the axis of horizontal checks and

balances, but it has also moved aggressively in a more democratic direction in terms of inclusion. And much of the latter is occurring within the governing party itself and its social movement bases. The internal organization of the dominant party, in short, acts both as a mechanism of inclusion and as a source of constraint on the party's leadership.

In what follows, we develop these ideas in greater detail. We start, first, by examining how the literature tends to characterize the relationship between autocrat-leaning leaders and party organization. We then offer an additional take on the relationship, in which we look beyond the formal structure of the party itself to examine the role that the party's social bases of support can play in influencing leadership behavior. Next, we undertake a case study of the Bolivian MAS to show that, when parties rely on social movements as a core constituency (Gibson 1997), these can act as a source of constraint on party leaders even in the absence of formal party structures. Moreover, the influence that social movements exert can extend beyond party leadership and into government policy, especially when the party in question attains power.

Understanding Weak Bureaucratic Structures

To what extent does party organization impact the way a political party exercises power? This question is especially important in party systems dominated by a single party, or where the traditional parties are widely discredited. Here, the formal party opposition tends to be weak, and so external checks on unwarranted concentrations of power may be absent. Such is the well-known pattern in cases as varied as Mexico under the rule of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucionalista* (PRI) and South Africa under the rule of the African National Congress (ANC). Under this circumstance, *internal* constraints—to the extent that they exist—may be the only moderating force on a party leader with hegemonic aspirations.

The sources of internal constraints have typically been conceived as twofold in the comparative parties literature. On the one hand, internal divisions may become salient in the absence of external competition. In this situation, party factions may serve as a credible threat to the controlling leader or group. Modifying certain policy positions, ceding decision-making power over candidacies, and/or acknowledging potential alternations in power might mitigate such internal power struggles. Regardless of the mechanisms, the centralizing tendencies of the party leader would be curtailed through the functioning of internal party structures. Internal constraints like this were prevalent during the period of predominance of the Mexican PRI (see, e.g., Langston 2006, Magaloni 2006, Langston 2017). They were activated in *Acción Democrática* (AD) in Venezuela when it obtained a governing majority (Coppedge 1997). And they appear to be at work in the case of Uruguay's *Frente Amplio* (FA), whose internal structures encourage power dispersion by allowing grass-roots activists and party factions major decision-making power (Pérez Bentancur et al. 2020).

On the other hand, another source of internal constraints may come from the degree of institutionalization of the party itself. In this account, highly institutionalized parties by their nature have a set of procedures and rules about membership and delegation of authority that must be (and typically are) followed. These procedures and rules keep party leaders in check. At times, the routinized nature of the party can bring about organizational rigidity and keep the party from adapting successfully to external challenges (Levitsky 2003, Levitsky and Burgess 2003). Entrepreneurial leaders who might otherwise successfully navigate a crisis are not able to do so precisely because the party rules impede their room for maneuver. In these circumstances weak bureaucratic structures are a boon for leadership autonomy and can potentially enable the

centralization of power. Perhaps most famously, the *Partido Justicialista* (PJ) in Argentina fits this mold of weak institutionalization and high adaptive capacity (Gibson 1997, Levitsky 2003).

Both arguments about the factors that might work against centralizing tendencies rely upon the development of a strong bureaucratic apparatus. In each case, formally defined rules predominate, such that factions can predictably vie for power or party leaders are prevented from making last-minute ideological changes or policy decisions. The implication of either theory is that checks on the power of elite actors within parties are contingent on the development of highly institutionalized party bureaucracies.

To be sure, informal institutions permeate most party organizations and often replace formal rules and procedures in the Latin American context (Helmke and Levitsky 2006). We suggest that at least one type of informal mechanism exists to keep leaders with authoritarian tendencies in check, even in the absence of a strong bureaucratic party apparatus that restrains their power and autonomy. Specifically, we suggest that while a party's loose bureaucratic development can enable power concentration and allow the party leadership to act autonomously, it can also, under certain conditions, generate the obverse: opportunities for internal contestation, consensus building, and negotiation, as well as a disperse set of actors with decision-making—and veto or “constraining”—powers.

Under conditions of informality and loose bureaucratic development, then, the party's social bases of support may be able to work through informal channels and find ways to wield significant power over central decision-making and thereby influence, constrain, and hold the party leadership accountable. The Bolivian case demonstrates that, under those conditions, the party's grass-roots social bases wield significant influence over the selection of party candidates for public office, which is essential to internal democracy and vertical accountability. Moreover,

through autonomous forms of social mobilization, they also find ways to influence or veto policy initiatives and to shape the policy agenda overall, acting as safeguards against autocratic proclivities. These mechanisms of societal accountability and responsiveness only become operative because the party's formal bureaucratic structure is weakly developed.

These social sources of constraint and checks on executive power do exist and work in a more or less continuous way in the case of the Bolivian MAS. As we detail below, the relationship between the governing party and its social movement bases is best described as a hybrid model where the party's weak bureaucratic development encouraged power concentration in the hands of a powerful president, one whose leadership has grown increasingly personalistic (Madrid 2012), but also enabled the party's bases to shape leadership patterns and even counteract unwarranted concentrations of power.

While party-movement dynamics help to partially constrain the most powerful tendencies toward concentrated, executive authority, these dynamics have not been without their tensions. In Bolivia, for example, they have made progress in key areas difficult: they have enabled Morales to forgo grooming a successor, fostering difficulties with political succession. The jury is still out as to whether the MAS will escape the most damaging consequences of Morales' authoritarian proclivities. Indeed, Morales will seek yet another term despite losing a referendum that would have paved a legal path for reelection. Still, the fact remains: Morales does not have *carte blanche* to do as he pleases. In the remaining sections, we examine how the MAS' informal forms of accountability and responsiveness came to be and demonstrate their consequences, both with respect to Morales' presidency and in terms of democracy overall in the country.

Origins and Development of the MAS

The MAS emerged in 1995.¹ It started out as a small, localized party that was initially regarded as an “instrument” of a specific social group, the *cocaleros* in the Chapare. Although the MAS started out small, it experienced a vertiginous growth in a very short period of time and became the electoral vehicle for a broad set of urban and rural grass-roots social movements. It also became the country’s largest party in less than a decade, as its leader, Evo Morales, was elected to the presidency in 2005 and then reelected in 2009 and 2014. Today, 13 years after it gained national-level power for the first time, the MAS remains the only truly national party in Bolivia and is that country’s undisputed governing party. Importantly, it achieved territorial and organizational expansion not so much through the development of an elaborate territorial party infrastructure, but mostly through tapping into the organizational apparatus of existing mass organizations and civic networks and integrating them within the party. It followed, in other words, a “social movement” path to party building that boosted the political clout of social movements in decision-making since early on (Anria 2018).²

The history of the MAS has been widely documented (Van Cott 2005; Stefanoni and Do Alto 2006; Escóbar 2008; Madrid 2011; Grisaffi 2018). It bears noting, however, how truly organic and bottom-up the party and the leadership were at the party’s founding. Evo Morales rose to the fore of the *cocalero* movement in the heat of the cycles of contention around coca eradication in the early 1980s (Sivak 2010). Morales had started as the Secretary of Sports for his local union in 1982—the San Francisco Syndicate—but then worked his way up the union ladder

¹ This section draws heavily on Anria (2018).

² To be sure, the MAS did not emerge in a political vacuum. Its meteoric rise occurred on the heels of a severe crisis of representation that brought about the collapse of the previous party system, which was anchored by three traditional political parties, the MNR, MIR, and ADN. Since 2005, these parties have been essentially non-existent on the national stage (Cyr 2017). Attempts to mount an opposition to the MAS have been weak at best.

and was elected as the Executive Secretary of the Federation of the Tropics in 1988 (Sivak 2010: 42). His leadership was distinctively bottom-up. *Cocalero* unionism, as Sivak (2010: 43) notes, was Morales' political school. It marked his "political origin, and for many years he understood politics as the sum of assemblies, negotiations with politicians and officials, and fights in the streets and roads."

Before the MAS became what is known today as "the MAS," Morales and other peasant leaders formed several electoral vehicles based on the idea of "self-representation" of popular social actors—an idea that had been on the agenda of rural unions since the early 1990s (García Linera, León, and Monje 2004). Attaining legal registration was not easy, however. It was only after *cocaleros* borrowed the legal registration of a dying party, the MAS-U, that they were able to participate in national elections using the MAS's legal registration, its emblems, and its blue, black, and white colors. The union leaders who founded the MAS still reject the "party" designation and refer to the MAS as a direct extension of the union organization (Van Cott 2005: 103; Grisaffi 2018: 46, 48).

A major turning point for the party was in 2002, when Evo Morales finished second in his presidential bid. Although the MAS did not capture the presidency, the size of its parliamentary block grew from 4 to 35 representatives. By 2002, the MAS not only had become Bolivia's main opposition party, but significant institutional positions in Congress would then serve as a power base for future elections. The party's major breakthrough was in 2005, when Morales was elected to the presidency in a landslide victory.

The MAS's ascent to national power was meteoric. Between 1995 and 2005, the party became a hybrid fusion of party and movements and developed two distinctive social coalitions that are still observable today. The central coalition—or the party's core constituency—is highly

stable and targeted; it is based on Bolivia's rural sector and consists of the *cocaleros* in the Chapare, as well as three national-level peasant associations, which conceive of the MAS as their creation under their tutelage.³ In this segment, the MAS is organized from the bottom-up and relies on the collective, assembly-like (*asambleísta*) style of decision-making utilized in Bolivia's rural social movements—especially those in the country's highlands. However, it bears noting that the idea of strict bottom-up control in this segment is not always empirically accurate. As it has been widely documented, the MAS's top leadership does not always respect the wishes of the social bases, and there are in fact growing tensions between the rank-and-file and the party leadership over aspects of policy (Anria 2018: 85; Grisaffi 2018: 50).

The peripheral coalition relies on a wider set of grass-roots organizations in Bolivia's largest cities, where neighborhood associations, trade unions, cooperatives, and other forms of organization play a key articulatory role. This expansion of the party to urban areas was based, first, on the ability of the MAS to aggregate interests and bundle issues together by finding common programmatic ground, articulating the claims for a remarkably diverse array of movements that were mobilized in opposition to neoliberalism and extractive policies—a process by which the MAS became an “instrument” for a broader set of subordinate social actors. Second, the strategy used to attract these more diverse peripheral constituencies combined attempts to co-opt the leadership of local organizations with the pursuit of political alliances with established center-left parties in hopes of reaching middle class segments (Anria 2013).

³ These organizations are the so-called *trillizas* (the triplets), which include the Unique Confederation of Rural Laborers of Bolivia (*Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*, CSUTCB); the Syndicalist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia (*Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia*, CSCIB); and the Bartolina Sisa National Confederation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Native Women of Bolivia (*Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa,”* CNMCIQB-BS).

The MAS's rural roots reflect patterns of bottom-up organization and organic movement—party linkages—a pattern that has facilitated some degree of grass-roots control over the leadership and is associated with the party's "movement" origins. On the other hand, this 10-year period of vertiginous growth and extension into urban areas—and the evolution of the party "apparatus" in power, with growing access to patronage resources—posed important challenges to the party's founding, "bottom-up" organizational characteristics. The party expansion fostered not only the emergence of top-down mobilization strategies but also the co-optation of community and social-movement leaders into mid-level government positions—a process that at the same time compromised the autonomy of many civil society groups (Zuazo 2010: 120). Although expansion posed important challenges to the party's bottom-up foundational characteristics, the party's grass-roots social bases found ways to preserve autonomy and replicate the party's "genetic imprint" as expansion occurred—and as the party exercised public office.

In all, different groups were incorporated into the party organization in distinct ways. This type of expansion was possible because the party adopted from early on a loose bureaucratic structure. Absent a unified set of rules overseeing the party's structure, the party could integrate new sectors and voices in segmented ways, an approach that facilitated the over-time reproduction of the party's DNA. Without bureaucratic structures acting as "transmission belts" the concentration of power in the hands of Evo Morales became possible. With time, his leadership became increasingly personalistic and plebiscitarian (Madrid 2012). At the same time, the loose bureaucratic development of the party provided opportunities for the party's social bases to act autonomously, with few bureaucratic constraints. This meant that, as expansion took place, MAS-affiliated movements in Bolivia retained significant degrees of autonomy from

Morales and the MAS and continued to influence, constrain, and hold the party's leadership accountable.

Weak Party Structures and Social Sources of Constraint

The MAS' bureaucracy is weakly developed. To be sure, the party has limited professional paid staff, equipment, records of membership and finances. However, formal leadership bodies such as the National Directorate and the Departmental Directorates lack independent authority vis-à-vis MAS officeholders, particularly the president and his ministers, and also prominent leaders of allied civil society groups. Prominent political figures within the MAS see formal leadership bodies as "empty shells."

According to the party statute, the highest decision-making body is the Regular National Congress (CON). It invites delegates of MAS-affiliated movements and organizations to participate and elect members to the party's National Directorate. The CON also invites allied movements and popular organizations to approve, reform, or modify the party's Declaration of Principles, the Program of Government, and the Statute (Article 18, c). Another important party convention is the Organic Congress, which meets to decide on matters of party organization and fundamental questions about the party's future (Article 19). Although party decision-making bodies help to coordinate campaign activities and solve conflicts in and in-between election cycles, they lack real independent power.

Elected representatives for the MAS are only related to the party structure indirectly, as they are agents of many principals. Many have been nominated by civil society organizations with which they retain strong connections; others have been nominated "from above" due to their individual contribution to the overall party list; and finally, they all have been elected by voters,

most of whom are neither party nor social movement members. The lack of a strong party structure coordinating legislative activity means that representatives typically lack a common socialization inside the party. And because they come from multiple sectors of society, they do not have a common socialization outside the party either. This creates incentives for the executive branch to centralize power and discipline the behavior of MAS representatives. The party's loose bureaucratic structures, again, create strong incentives for the executive branch to develop its own instances of coordination, which serve the party leadership to centralize power and discipline the legislative behavior of MAS representatives. Their behavior in office follows an executive-enforced party discipline that, at times, is at odds with the logic of constituency representation. In sum, though formal party structures do exist and operate on a regular basis, they lack independent power and their role is fairly limited. Coordination between the party leadership and its social bases happen mostly through non-bureaucratic and informal channels.

This is best exemplified in how the party nominates candidates for public office. No clear rules guide candidate selection processes. In the absence of those rules, selection is contingent on the interaction, balance of power, interaction, and political alignments between party and civil society actors (Anria 2016). Consultations over policy also happen through informal channels. Not only does Morales consult about strategic decisions with the leadership of major popular movements, but he also includes their demands, claims, and priorities on the agenda.⁴ An example of this informality would be the Cochabamba Summit of December 2011, which was an ad hoc meeting convened by Morales and the MAS to receive input on public policies from below.⁵

⁴ Granted, those movements do not have full control of the agenda, but policy-making is a fairly interactive and negotiated process (Silva 2018).

⁵ By the end of the summit, which ensured the participation of a wide array of allied and non-allied groups, 70 legislative proposals were made and sent to Congress. Critics argue that the MAS use these

Additionally, the party's social bases have constraining or counter-mobilization powers that function in the absence of strong bureaucratic party structures. Autonomous mobilization has in fact remained an important check on executive power—a “social veto” that the MAS's social bases exercise by either blocking and/or modifying government proposals that are on the public agenda. For example, at the end of 2010, social mobilizations erupted in protest of Morales' decision to end gasoline subsidies. The outcry amongst his constituents was such that he was forced to reverse his decree. Similarly, movements broke out in protest again in 2011 when the government stated its intention to build a highway through an autonomous indigenous territory – the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS). Here, too, Morales was forced to back down. In both cases, Morales' capacity to govern unhindered by the demands of his constituents was at play. Each time, Morales failed. And these dynamics have been observed in additional instances more recently (Silva 2017; Mayorga 2019).

Certainly, since the MAS came to power, governing authority has become increasingly concentrated in the executive. Contestation—although vibrant at the subnational level—has been stunted at the national level. The MAS' weak bureaucratic structure was complicit in these centralizing tendencies. It also, however, has constrained Morales' autonomy of action in certain ways, including when it came to policy decisions that were highly unpopular with his base. Although formal channels for voicing opposition within the party are weak, movements that underpin the MAS can effectively oppose Morales by taking to the street. These countervailing measures must be taken into account to fully understand how Morales acts in power.

types of meetings instrumentally to boost its image and its alleged participatory ethos when its relationships with social movements are contested in the streets.

Party Organization, Inclusion, and its Real-World Consequences

The unique structure of the MAS has also, we assert, had longer-term consequences on democracy in the country. On the one hand, since Morales' election certain liberal dimensions of democracy have been weakened, even dangerously so. Yet, it is also possible to identify important strides toward greater political inclusiveness since Morales came to office. While the strikes against liberal democracy in the country have been duly studied (Levitsky and Loxton 2013; Weyland 2013; Alberti 2016), the progress made in terms of democratic inclusion is often underemphasized.

Inclusion is a key democratic good; it entails a move toward less political inequality (Dahl 1971; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). In Bolivia, political inclusion cannot be taken for granted. Structural inequalities have long underpinned and often sustained regime dynamics. Indeed, the exclusive nature of the previous party system explains, in great part, the crisis of representation that immediately preceded Morales' election (Cyr 2017). Yet, since the MAS came to power, the formal representation of previously excluded groups, including the lower classes, has increased. This is true at both the national and subnational levels. Moreover, the arrival of new groups, voices, and faces to governing bodies has impacted the kinds of policies pursued. Since the MAS came to power, the country has experienced dramatic improvements with respect to social spending and in terms of different developmental outcomes.

More Inclusion, Greater Representation. A major advance in terms of political inclusiveness relates to the composition of representative institutions. While reforms in the 1990s, like the 1994 Law of Popular Participation (LPP), created opportunities for the incorporation of popular groups into municipal governments (Kohl 2003), the formation of the

MAS, and its subsequent ascendance to national power, served as a vehicle for their inclusion on a national scale. An early turning point was the 2002 national election, when the MAS won significant minorities in both houses. These electoral victories enabled the arrival of representatives from previously excluded groups, particularly peasants, into Congress.⁶ Since then, Bolivia has experienced a greater circulation of political elites; actors of more diverse ethnic, class, and ideological composition have gradually, and pacifically, displaced the hitherto dominant political actors.

Indeed, some of the most notable transformations have taken place within existing institutions.⁷ For example, the social composition of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly (as Congress was renamed in the 2009 Constitution) has changed dramatically since Morales first came to power (Gonzales Salas 2013). This is due in great part to how the MAS selects candidates for elective office. Specifically, the party remains open to bottom-up influence in the realm of candidate selection, particularly in districts where civil society is densely organized, united, and politically aligned with the MAS (Anria 2018). The party's weak bureaucratic structure has allowed for the creation of informal mechanisms of candidate selection.

A greater degree of grassroots control over the selection of candidates has been consequential in Bolivia's political process: it led to the large-scale arrival of representatives that are nominated by popular groups, some of which have great mobilizational and electoral power. Indeed, since the MAS came to power, the most important attribute for candidate nomination is having experience as a leader of a grassroots social organization (Zegada and Komadina 2014:

⁶ Of course, the growing presence of indigenous peoples in positions of power cannot only be attributable to the MAS, and it can even be traceable to the 1952 National Revolution; however, the MAS strengthened these pre-existing trends.

⁷ According to Zegada et al. (2011: 196), despite the recognition of different forms of democracy in the country's constitution, "representative democracy continues to articulate the political arena."

93-4).⁸ Overall, the percentage of middle-class professionals in the legislature has decreased from 48.7 percent in the 1993-97 legislative period to 17.7 in 2010-14. By contrast, the percentage of peasants, artisans, and formal and informal sector workers—groups strongly linked with the MAS—grew from 3.9 percent to 26.3 percent in the same period (Anria 2018: 92).⁹ Similar trends can be observed in the executive branch, the judiciary, and the state bureaucracy (Soruco Sologuren 2015; Wolff 2018; Anria 2018). In short, the social and demographic profile of elected representatives and public officialdom now features more peasants, indigenous people, and members of urban-popular groups. This is an exceptional change for a society characterized by deep ethnic divisions and social exclusion.¹⁰

To be sure, as Jonas Wolff (2018: 9) notes, greater political inclusiveness in Bolivia is “far from egalitarian or universal” and has brought about new exclusions. For one thing, the national peasant organizations that founded the MAS have enjoyed privileged access to and direct participation on policy-making, whereas identity-oriented indigenous movements (like CONAMAQ and CIDOB) have been comparatively sidelined from the policy process (Silva 2017; 2018). At the same time, some policy spheres remain somewhat “sealed” and offer little room for subordinate social actors to exert meaningful influence, such as economic policy (Anria 2018: 144).

The impact of inclusion on representation is not just felt at the national level, however, where the behavior of an increasingly powerful executive can constrain legislative autonomy. It

⁸ Although there was a shift to greater representation of women after 2006, this increase can by no means be attributable only to the MAS; it is rather a by-product of the mobilization of Bolivia’s women’s movement. Bolivia introduced a gender parity law with the 2009 constitution.

⁹ As an interesting aside, the mode of nomination utilized by the MAS has ushered in a sort of Duvergerian “contagion from the left” that had an impact on how other parties select their own candidates, and *whom* they select. In 2014, even Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga—a conservative candidate—ran for the presidency with an indigenous activist as a running mate. Examples like these abound.

¹⁰ Zegada and Komadina (2014: 93-94) reached similar conclusions.

is also felt strongly at the subnational level, where greater representation of previously marginalized groups consolidated since the early 2000s, but especially since the MAS came to power (Komadina and Zegada 2014: 222). These representatives enjoy comparatively higher levels of autonomy from the national-level executive than representatives in the Plurinational National Assembly (Komadina and Zegada 2014: 207).

Inclusion and Policy Outcomes. Beyond the symbolic importance of a more diverse political elite, gains made in political inclusion have also had a demonstrable impact on everyday life in the country. The experience of the MAS in power has resulted in important shifts in domestic power relations that have empowered large segments of the population that were traditionally subordinate. Those shifts have led to the development of more inclusive modes of political and economic decision-making and greater regime responsiveness to the interests of previously marginalized social actors, especially the many Bolivians of indigenous, non-European heritage, who make up more than half the population.

For one, greater inclusion encouraged successive MAS governments to advance an aggressive agenda of expansive social policy (Niedzwiecki and Anria 2019). Public spending on basic infrastructure, health, education, and to a lesser extent, social security has accelerated substantially when compared to the 1990s (and, also, to Latin America's "top performers," according to Huber and Stephens 2012: 123). Spending on education, for instance, is currently among the highest in the region—about 7.5 percent of the GDP. Data on social spending are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Social Spending as percentage of GDP

	1990s*	2004*	2006-12**
Education	2.9	6.5	7.0
Health	0.4	2.9	5.3
Social Security and Welfare	2.9	4.8	4.4

(*) Huber and Stephens (2012: 123).

(**) Elaborated with data from ECLAC. These data for Social Security do not include the *Renta Dignidad*; the total amount spent in this program is about 1.5 percent of GDP per year.

High taxes on extractive industries in a context of booming international prices helped the MAS to fund generous social policy innovations. These include a universal noncontributory pension, conditional cash transfers to low-income families with children, and for pregnant women. In addition to their immediate social impact, these *bonos* may generate strong policy legacies that make them harder to reverse. Although they are modest transfers, they directly benefit broad segments of society. Today's presidential candidates are all promising to maintain these programs should they come to power.¹¹

¹¹ Other notable policies include a wide array of subsidies for the low-income (on electricity, natural gas, water, gasoline, communications) and sustained increases on the minimum wage.

Table 3 Basic Social Indicators*

	2000	2004	2011
Total population living in poverty (%)	66.40	63.1	44.90
Rural population living in poverty (%)	54.50	54.4	36.84
Urban population living in poverty (%)	87.00	77.7	61.35
MarketGINI	54.75	55.74	45.90
NetGINI	55.36	53.44	43.28

(*) Table elaborated with data from Solt (2014).

Table 3 shows that poverty in Bolivia has decreased markedly, particularly in rural contexts, but also in urban areas. Specifically, more than one million people (over 10% of the country's population) has escaped poverty. Moreover, Bolivia experienced the sharpest declines in inequality in the region—a remarkable achievement by itself but also when placed in comparative terms (Anria and Huber 2018). Whereas economic growth has been one of the primary drivers of poverty reduction during the 2000s, it has not been the only factor responsible for this pronounced decrease in inequality. Transfers and social investment help to explain this reduction. Social protection, for instance, was highly regressive until 2005, when post tax-and-transfer GINI coefficients were higher than market (pre-tax transfer) GINIS. The trend reversed and stayed that way. Greater inclusion, in short, has had clear policy consequences and effects on the distribution of resources—they have increased equality in social and economic outcomes.

Conclusions

Far from descending into open authoritarianism and political and economic chaos like the other “Bolivarian” or “populist” experiences, Bolivia has remained broadly democratic, and the social, political, and economic changes in the country have been remarkable. The greater power of subordinate groups is real, and it has led to a reduction of economic and social inequalities

with positive feedback effects. The empowerment of subordinate groups has increased their political participation, as well as their capacity to hold elites accountable and push policy in a redistributive direction. Not surprisingly, according to *Latinobarómetro*, trust in the government remains high—comparable to Latin America’s highest performers—and Bolivia today has one of the lowest percentages of the population agreeing that their country is governed for the benefit of the powerful.

Key to this outcome, we have suggested, is the weak bureaucratic structure that underpins the MAS. In some ways, the lack of procedural rules has led the MAS to conform to theoretical expectations (e.g., Gibson 1997; Levitsky 2003). The party leadership has had considerable autonomy to grow the party and expand its coalition of support without threatening its core constituency—the country’s rural social movements. That autonomy has also led, at times, to disturbing centralizing trends on the part of the party’s leader, Evo Morales. Yet, that same loose structure has had the counterintuitive effect of empowering the party’s bases, which have important, if informal, influence in selecting candidates and shaping policy—so much so that Morales’ autonomy of action has been, at times, constrained. Weak bureaucratic structures can create mechanisms of *social* constraint, and we expect that these should be especially powerful in political parties that rely on social movements as a primary source of support.

However, not every part of this equation is virtuous. As we have noted at the outset, Morales has clear authoritarian proclivities—just like other leaders on the “populist” strand of the Latin American left. He is not a liberal democrat, and he does not hide it. He sees little meaningful role for the opposition. Morales’ insistence on running for yet another reelection is strong evidence of his autocratic temptations, and a question mark on his democratic credentials. An eventual victory in 2019, which is not unlikely but is also not guaranteed, can lead to even

greater abuses of power—and may lead to an atrophy of the links between the party and its social movement bases, which are key to explaining Morales' success

Nevertheless, we have identified a set of political conditions and mechanisms that help to restrain aspiring autocrats. Our analysis invites comparative analysis of the dynamic relationships between leaders with autocratic inclinations, party organization, social movements, and regime-level dynamics. It reinforces the centrality of party structures as paramount for shaping certain leadership behaviors, while demonstrating that no single type of structure—strong or loose, institutionalized or not—can predict the its behavioral impact.

References—list might be incomplete, sorry.

- Albro, Robert. 2015. "Bolivia's Elections and Evo's Surprising Political Malaise." *AULA Blog*.
<http://aulablog.net/2015/04/09/bolivias-elections-and-evos-surprising-political-malaise/>.
- Anria, Santiago. 2016. "More Inclusion, Less Liberalism in Bolivia." *Journal of Democracy* 27 (3):
99–108. <http://doi:10.1353/jod.2016.0037>.
- . 2018. *When Movements Become Parties: The Bolivian MAS in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Anria, Santiago, and Evelyne Huber. 2018. "The Key to Evo Morales' Political Longevity." *Foreign Affairs*, February 14, 2018.
- Calderón, Fernando. 1986.
- Calderón, Fernando, and Eduardo Gamarra. 2003. "Crisis, inflexión y reforma del sistema de partidos en Bolivia." *Colombia internacional* 58: 90-122.
- Cameron, Maxwell. 2018. "Making Sense of Competitive Authoritarianism: Lessons from the Andes." *Latin American Politics and Society* 60 (2): 1–22.
- Centellas, Miguel. 2018. "Bolivia en 2017: rumbo a la incertidumbre", *Revista Ciencia Política* Vol. 38 (2): 155-179.
- Coppedge, Michael. 1997. *Strong parties and lame ducks: presidential partyarchy and factionalism in Venezuela*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Eaton, Kent. 2007. "Backlash in Bolivia: Regional Autonomy as a Reaction against Indigenous Mobilization." *Politics & Society* 35 (1): 71–102. <http://doi:10.1177/0032329206297145>.

Falleti, Tulia G., and Thea N. Riofrancos. 2018. "Endogenous Participation: Strengthening Prior Consultation in Extractive Economies." *World Politics* 70 (1): 86–121.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S004388711700020X>.

Gamarra, Eduardo. 1997.. "Hybrid Presidentialism and Democratization: The Case of Bolivia". In Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Shugart, eds., *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge (363-93).

García Linera, Álvaro. 2010. "El Estado en transición. Bloque de poder y punto de bifurcación." In Álvaro García Linera, Raúl Prada, Luis Tapia, and Oscar Vega Camacho, eds., *El Estado. Campo de Lucha*. La Paz: Muela del Diablo. 7-40.

Gibson, Edward L. 1997. "The populist road to market reform: Policy and electoral coalitions in Mexico and Argentina." *World Politics* 49.3: 339-370.

Gonzales Salas, Inés. 2013.

Helmke, Gretchen, and Steven Levitsky, eds. 2006. *Informal institutions and democracy: Lessons from Latin America*. Washington DC: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Huber, Evelyne, and John D. Stephens. 2012. *Democracy and the Left: Social Policy and Inequality in Latin America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Katz, Richard S., and Peter Mair. 1995. "Changing models of party organization and party democracy: the emergence of the cartel party." *Party politics* 1 (1): 5-28.

Kohl, Benjamin. 2003. "Democratizing Decentralization in Bolivia: The Law of Popular Participation." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23 (2): 153–64. <http://doi:10.1177/0739456X03258639>.

Kohl, Benjamin H., and Linda C. Farthing. 2006. *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance*. London/New York: Zed Books.

- Langston, Joy. 2017. *Democratization and authoritarian party survival: Mexico's PRI*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Langston, Joy. 2007. "The PRI's 2006 Electoral Debacle." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 40.1: 21-25.
- Lazarte, Jorge. 2006.
- Laserna, Roberto, Henry Oporto, Luis Verdesoto, and Maria T Zegada. 2007. *Constitución Y Poder Político. Propuestas de Reforma Para Bolivia*. Cochabamba, Bolivia: Iniciativas Democráticas, CERES.
- Levitsky, Steven. 2003. *Transforming labor-based parties in Latin America: Argentine Peronism in comparative perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Katrina Burgess. 2003. "Explaining populist party adaptation in Latin America: Environmental and organizational determinants of party change in Argentina, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela." *Comparative Political Studies* 36.8.
- Levitsky, Steven, and James Loxton. 2013. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes." *Democratization* 20 (1): 107–36.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. [Add publisher]
- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mandaville, Alicia Phillips. 2004. "Bolivia's Political Party System and the Incentives for Pro-Poor Reform." *Report to DFID. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs: Washington*. https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/1852_bo_propoor_100104.pdf (last accessed, August 20, 2018).
- Mayorga, Fernando. 2019.
- Mayorga, René Antonio. 1997. "Bolivia's silent revolution." *Journal of Democracy* 8 (1): 142-156.
- Mayorga, René Antonio. 2017. "Populismo Autoritario Y Transición Regresiva: La Dictadura

- Plebiscitaria En La Región Andina.” *Revista Latinoamericana de Política Comparada* 12: 39–69.
- McCoy, Jennifer. 2017. “Lessons from Venezuela’s Pernicious Polarization,” *LASA Forum*, XLXIII (1) (Winter): 53-57.
- O’Donnell, Guillermo. 1986. “Toward an Alternative Conceptualization of South American Politics.” In *Promises of Development: Theories of Change in Latin America*, ed. Peter F. Klarén and Thomas J. Bossert, 239–75. Boulder and London: Westview Press.
- Roberts, Kenneth. 2015. *Changing Course in Latin America: Party Systems in the Neoliberal Era*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Silva, Eduardo. 2009. *Challenging Neoliberalism in Latin America*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2017. “Reorganizing Popular Sector Incorporation.” *Politics & Society* 45 (1): 91–122. <http://doi:10.1177/0032329216683166>.
- . 2018.
- Sánchez-Sibony, Omar. 2013. “Democratic Breakdowns via a Thousand Blows in Latin America.” *LASA Forum* 44 (4): 7–9.
- Slater, Dan, and Erica Simmons. 2013. “Coping by Colluding Political Uncertainty and Promiscuous Powersharing in Indonesia and Bolivia.” *Comparative Political Studies* 46 (11): 1366–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012453447>.
- Solt, Frederick. 2014. “The Standardized World Income Inequality Database.” Working paper. <http://myweb.uiowa.edu/fsolt/swiid/swiid.html>.
- Soruco Sologuren, Ximena. 2015.

Stoyan, Alissandra. 2014. "Constituent Assemblies, Presidential Majorities, and Democracy in Latin America." Ph.D Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Department of Political Science: Department of Political Science.

Tockman, Jason. 2014.

Tockman, Jason, and John Cameron. 2014. "Indigenous Autonomy and the Contradictions of Plurinationalism in Bolivia." *Latin American Politics and Society* 56 (3): 46–69.

Van Cott, Donna Lee. 2005. *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Politics*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Van Cott, Donna Lee. 2000. "Party system development and indigenous populations in Latin America: the Bolivian case." *Party Politics* 6 (2): 155-174.

Weyland, Kurt. 2013. "The Threat from the Populist Left." *Journal of Democracy* 24 (3): 18–32.
<http://doi:10.1353/jod.2013.0045>.

Wolff, Jonas. 2018. "Political Incorporation in Measures of Democracy: A Missing Dimension (and the Case of Bolivia)." *Democratization* 25 (4): 692–708.

Zegada, María, Claudia Arce, Gabriela Canedo, and Alber Quispe Escobar. 2011. *La Democracia Desde Los Márgenes : Transformaciones En El Campo Político Boliviano*. La Paz, Bolivia: Muela del Diablo.

Zegada, Maria Teresa, and Jorge Komadina. 2014. *El Espejo de La Sociedad: Poder Y Representación En Bolivia*. La Paz, Bolivia: CERES/Plural.