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# **Elections in Bolivia**

## *2019 General Elections*

### Frequently Asked Questions

Americas

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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# Frequently Asked Questions

When is Election Day?..... 1

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day? ..... 1

How is Bolivia’s political system structured? What are its policies on presidential reelection? ..... 1

What is the election management body? What are its powers? ..... 2

Who can vote? How many registered voters are there?..... 2

Who are the presidential candidates?..... 3

Why are these elections important? ..... 4

To what extent do women have equal access to political participation? ..... 5

How are electoral authorities promoting equal access to the electoral process for indigenous persons? .6

Will there be observation during Election Day? ..... 6

How will voters cast their ballots? ..... 6

When will official results be announced? ..... 7

Resources ..... 8

*Disclosure:*  
*These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Bolivian elections authorities as of October 18, 2019, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

## When is Election Day?

On October 20, 2019, Bolivia will hold presidential and legislative elections. These elections follow the primary elections held on January 27, 2019.

## Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

In the 2019 general elections, Bolivians will vote for:

- The president and vice president
- All 130 deputies to the Chamber of Deputies and their alternates
- All 36 senators to the Chamber of Senators and their alternates<sup>1</sup>

All elected officials will serve five-year terms. In the presidential election, if no candidate gets at least 50 percent of the vote, or at least 40 percent with a 10-point margin of victory against the nearest competitor, a runoff will be held on December 15, 2019.<sup>2</sup>

In the legislative elections, 36 senators will be elected through a closed-list proportional representation system. In the lower house, 130 deputies will be elected using a mixed-member proportional representation system, with 70 members directly elected by plurality vote in single-member constituencies, 53 elected through closed-list proportional representation from party lists and the remaining seven elected by plurality vote in special constituencies set aside for deputies of native and indigenous areas from seven of Bolivia's nine departments.<sup>34</sup>

## How is Bolivia's political system structured? What are its policies on presidential reelection?

Bolivia is a plurinational state with four branches of government: executive, legislative, judicial and electoral. The executive branch consists of the president, who is head of government and state, the vice president elected on the same ticket and a Cabinet appointed by the president.<sup>5</sup> The bicameral Legislative Assembly consists of a 36-member Chamber of Senators and a 130-member Chamber of Deputies. The judicial branch includes the Plurinational Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Council of Magistrates and the Agro-Environmental Court. All the judges on the national courts are elected to six-year terms from a list of candidates preselected by the Legislative Assembly.

Bolivia became the first country in the world to popularly elect its national judges in 2011 and subsequent elections took place in 2017.<sup>67</sup> The electoral branch, listed independently from the other

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<sup>1</sup> [http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2019-07/20/c\\_138241707.htm](http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2019-07/20/c_138241707.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.as-coa.org/content/guide-2019-latin-american-elections/bolivia>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2449/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bl.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://bolivia.infoleyes.com/norma/576/estructura-organizativa-del-organo-ejecutivo-del-estado-plurinacional-29894>

<sup>6</sup> [http://myweb.fsu.edu/adriscoll/Research\\_files/Bolivia2017%20PyG%20final.pdf](http://myweb.fsu.edu/adriscoll/Research_files/Bolivia2017%20PyG%20final.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bolivia-politics/bolivians-spoil-ballots-in-judicial-vote-to-protest-morales-idUSKBN1DY2I5>

three branches of government in the 2009 Constitution, is made up of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the Departmental Electoral Tribunals, electoral judges, polling place juries and electoral notaries.

## **What is the election management body? What are its powers?**

The Plurinational Electoral Body (OEP)<sup>8</sup>, led by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE)<sup>9</sup>, is the chief body charged with administering elections in Bolivia. The OEP enjoys complete autonomy and independence from the other branches of government, with which it cooperates and coordinates.

The essential function of the OEP is to guarantee the exercise of Bolivia's democracy, which is based on "the complementarity of direct and participatory, representative and community democracies."<sup>10</sup> The OEP's tasks include administering elections, announcing results, resolving electoral disputes, regulating political parties and managing the civic registry.

The TSE is composed of seven members who serve six-year terms without the possibility of reelection. Six of the members are elected by the Legislative Assembly and the seventh member is appointed by the president. At least two of the members must be of indigenous origin.

## **Who can vote? How many registered voters are there?**

Voting is mandatory for Bolivian citizens starting at 21 years old – or 18 if married – through secret ballot. All citizens must register with their neighborhood electoral notaries prior to elections. To register, they must present a national identity card, a birth certificate or a military service card. Because this is considered a civic duty, failure to register or take part in the electoral process invokes possible penalties including the inability to obtain a passport, hold public office and process a bank transaction for 90 days after the missed vote.<sup>11</sup> Only citizens over 70 years old may abstain voluntarily.

Bolivia's population is currently 11,379,861, and the average turnout is 82.26 percent<sup>12</sup>. According to 2016 data, there are 6,243,079 registered voters, 3,190,015 of whom are women.<sup>13</sup> There are approximately 96,000 registered voters who live abroad.<sup>14</sup> The National Statistics Institute estimates that 2,570,701 voters under the age of 30 will participate in this year's elections, which represents 39.9 percent of the electoral roll.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Órgano Electoral Plurinacional*

<sup>9</sup> *Tribunal Supremo Electoral*

<sup>10</sup> Arts. 1 and 5, Law No. 018

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.eldeber.com.bo/bolivia/Que-pasara-con-las-personas-que-no-voten-en-octubre-20190604-7187.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/27/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.ine.gob.bo/subtemas\\_cuadros/pPolitica/2090601.htm](https://www.ine.gob.bo/subtemas_cuadros/pPolitica/2090601.htm)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2019/07/15/bolivia-registra-cifra-historica-de-empadronamiento-en-el-exterior/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.eldeber.com.bo/bolivia/Electores-jovenes-llegan-a-25-millones-y-partidos-ofrecen-cuotas-en-sus-listas-20190106-0028.html>

## Who are the presidential candidates?

The nine presidential candidates and their running mates are<sup>16</sup>:

- Evo Morales
  - Vice President: Álvaro García Linera

Sitting President Evo Morales, of Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), is running with Álvaro García Linera. Morales became Bolivia's first indigenous president in 2006. A court decision paved the way for him to run for a fourth consecutive term in 2017.

- Carlos Mesa
  - Vice President: Gustavo Pedraza

Carlos Mesa, of Citizen Community (FRI), is 65 years old and a former president. His running mate is Gustavo Pedraza. Though he served as president from 2003-05, a win for Mesa would be his first national victory. As vice president under Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, he ascended to the presidency after Sánchez resigned amid violent protests over plans to export natural gas. Mesa himself resigned two years later under similar circumstances.<sup>17</sup>

- Israel Rodríguez
  - Vice President: Faustino Challapa Flores

Israel Rodríguez is an economist and statesman, running with Faustino Challapa Flores. He represents the Front for Victory (FPV).

- Virginio Lema Trigo
  - Vice President: Fernando Untoja

Virginio Lema Trigo, a journalist of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement party (MNR), is running with Fernando Untoja.

- Felix Patzi
  - Vice President: Lucila Mendieta Perez

Felix Patzi is an academic and politician and member of the Aymara ethnic group. He has been the governor of the department of La Paz since 2015 and is running with Lucila Mendieta Perez under the party he founded, Third System Movement (MTS).

- Ruth Nina
  - Vice President: Leopoldo Chui

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.oep.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Candidaturas\\_Finales\\_Elecciones\\_Primarias\\_2019.pdf](https://www.oep.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Candidaturas_Finales_Elecciones_Primarias_2019.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.americasquarterly.org/content/meet-candidates-bolivia>

Ruth Nina, of National Action Party Boliviano (PAN-BOL), is running with Leopoldo Chui. Nina is a lawyer, trade union leader, merchant and politician.

- Victor Hugo Cárdenas
  - Vice President: Humberto Peinado

Victor Hugo Cárdenas is a Bolivian indigenous activist and politician representing the Civic Solidarity Unit (UCS) with running mate Humberto Peinado.

- Jaime Paz Zamora
  - Vice President: Paola Lorena Barriga Machiaco

Jaime Paz Zamora, of the Democratic Christian Party (PDC), was president of Bolivia from 1989-93. He also served as vice president from 1982-84. He is running with Paola Lorena Barriga Machiaco.

- Oscar Miguel Ortiz Antelo
  - Vice President: Edwin Mario Rodríguez Espejo

Oscar Miguel Ortiz Antelo, a business administrator and current senator of Democratic Unity for the Department of Santa Cruz, is running with Edwin Mario Rodríguez Espejo under the party Bolivia Says No.

## Why are these elections important?

Evo Morales was elected as Bolivia's first indigenous president in 2006. He is currently in his 13th year in office, making him the longest consecutively serving head of state in Latin America. These elections are particularly important considering recent controversies over presidential term limits.

In Bolivia, the president is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The 2009 Constitution lifted the ban on presidents serving consecutive terms but maintained a two-term limit as codified in the 1967 Constitution.<sup>18</sup> Morales was able to win a third term however, because in the run-up to the 2014 elections the constitutional court ruled that Morales's first term, which was cut short by early elections and a constitutional referendum in 2009, should not be counted because it had not taken place under the new Constitution.<sup>19</sup>

The debate over term limits continued in 2016 when there was a constitutional referendum asking Bolivian citizens whether to keep or remove term limits. Bolivians voted to maintain the two-term limit, blocking both the president and vice president from running again. Despite this, the Bolivian constitutional court overruled the referendum and scrapped term limits in 2017, allowing Morales to run for a fourth term in this month's elections.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42165258>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-22351190>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bolivia-politics/bolivian-court-clears-the-way-for-morales-to-run-for-fourth-term-idUSKBN1DS2ZX>

Simultaneously, corruption remains a persistent problem in Bolivia, which Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranked 132 out of 180 countries in perceived openness.<sup>21</sup> The judiciary and police force are frequently seen as biased and corrupt. Additionally, a 2014 International Monetary Fund report on Bolivia documented poor reporting of tax expenditure and mismanagement of external audits.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, journalists often face harassment and human rights abuses remain prevalent in Bolivia. As of July, femicides, the killing of women because of their gender, are at the highest they have been since 2013, with 73 reported since January. The murders amount to one woman killed every two days. In May of this year, the Bolivian government declared it a national emergency.<sup>23</sup>

## **To what extent do women have equal access to political participation?**

In 1952, Bolivian women formally gained full political participation rights with the passage of universal suffrage. However, they have continued to be marginalized in the country's political processes. That being said, legal reforms and electoral changes in the past 20 years have helped push the needle forward on women's political equality.

In 1997, the Law on Electoral System Reform stated that one of every three people on candidates lists for the proportional representation seats in the Chamber of Deputies must be a woman. Through an electoral reform in 1999, Bolivia added a 30 percent quota for women in municipal elections and political party structures. Parity and alternation procedures to better enforce quotas were introduced in subsequent years and later codified in the 2009 Constitution.

Through these efforts, the number of elected women candidates has steadily increased.<sup>24</sup> In 1989 there were 11 women elected to the Chamber of Deputies and two women elected to the Chamber of Senators. In 2009, 33 women were elected to the Chamber of Deputies and 17 women were elected to the Chamber of Senators.<sup>25</sup> And in 2010 women made up 43 percent of municipal council seats. The trend applies to the election management body as well, where in the current TSE, three of the seven members are women.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.fairobserver.com/region/latin\\_america/bolivia-election-2019-evo-morales-latin-america-politics-news-16161/](https://www.fairobserver.com/region/latin_america/bolivia-election-2019-evo-morales-latin-america-politics-news-16161/)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/bolivia-declares-gender-killings-a-priority/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/2122-UNDP-GE-bolivia.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/2122-UNDP-GE-bolivia.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/2122-UNDP-GE-bolivia.pdf>

## **How are electoral authorities promoting equal access to the electoral process for indigenous persons?**

According to the 2012 National Census, 41 percent of the Bolivian population over the age of 15 are of indigenous origin and the National Institute of Statistics' 2017 projections indicate that this percentage is likely to have increased to 48 percent.

There are 38 recognized peoples in Bolivia. The majority in the Andes are Quechua-speaking peoples (49.5 percent) and Aymara (40.6 percent), who self-identify as 16 nations. In the lowlands, the Chiquitano (3.6 percent), Guaran (2.5 percent) and Mojeo (1.4 percent) peoples are in the majority and, together with the remaining 2.4 percent, make up 34 recognized indigenous peoples.

Although Bolivia adopted the status of a plurinational state in 2009 when the Constitution was redesigned under Evo Morales, Latin America's only indigenous president, the country's indigenous people still face challenges. Because the Andean population constitutes the majority, indigenous people in the lowlands are often misrepresented at the political level, as they do not possess much political weight or visibility. These differences also lead to differences in voting patterns.<sup>27</sup>

Thanks to the Framework Law on Autonomies of July 22, 2010, a number of indigenous peoples are now forming their own self-governments. Thirty-six indigenous autonomies have commenced the process for accessing self-government, 21 by means of municipal conversion and 15 by territorial means. Three have already established self-government, and another five have achieved autonomous status through a declaration of constitutionality.<sup>28</sup>

## **Will there be observation during Election Day?**

The Organization of American States (OAS) and the Government of Bolivia signed an agreement in May 2019 to deploy an observation mission to Bolivia for the general elections later this month. This will be the 18th electoral observation mission that the OAS has sent to Bolivia since 1966.<sup>29</sup>

## **How will voters cast their ballots?**

Voters will be able to cast their ballot in one of the 5,301 polling stations approved by the TSE in Bolivia and in 33 countries abroad. The TSE and the Departmental Electoral Courts designated 8,136 notaries, who will be responsible for attesting to the electoral acts that are carried out during the electoral process and provide logistic and operational support during the elections.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1492371>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.iwgia.org/en/bolivia>

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/photonews.asp?sCodigo=FNE-96608](http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/photonews.asp?sCodigo=FNE-96608)

<sup>30</sup> <http://fuentedirecta.oep.org.bo/noticia/el-tse-habilita-5-301-recintos-electorales-en-bolivia-y-en-el-exterior-para-las-elecciones-generales/>



## **When will official results be announced?**

Official results will be announced between November 4 and November 9, 2019, on the OEP's website and other media outlets in accordance with Law 26, Article 191.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> [https://www.oep.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Calendario\\_Electoral\\_EG\\_2019.pdf](https://www.oep.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Calendario_Electoral_EG_2019.pdf)

## Resources

- Articles 1 and 5, Law 018
- Electoral Code, Law 026
- Article 35 of the Regulations for the 2019 General Elections
- [https://www.ine.gob.bo/subtemas\\_cuadros/pPolitica/2090601.htm](https://www.ine.gob.bo/subtemas_cuadros/pPolitica/2090601.htm)<https://www.eldeber.com.bo/bolivia/Electores-jovenes-llegan-a-25-millones-y-partidos-ofrecen-cuotas-en-sus-listas-20190106-0028.html>
- [https://www.oep.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Candidaturas\\_Finales\\_Elecciones\\_Primarias\\_2019.pdf](https://www.oep.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Candidaturas_Finales_Elecciones_Primarias_2019.pdf)
- <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/2122-UNDP-GE-bolivia.pdf>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1492371>
- <https://www.iwgia.org/en/bolivia>
- [http://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/photonews.asp?sCodigo=FNE-96608](http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/photonews.asp?sCodigo=FNE-96608)
- <https://www.oep.org.bo/elecciones-generales-2019/>
- [https://www.oep.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Calendario\\_Electoral\\_EG\\_2019.pdf](https://www.oep.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Calendario_Electoral_EG_2019.pdf)