

Introduction

Bolivia has enjoyed from 2009 to 2019 a political and economic stability that had not experienced in a long time. Indeed, Bolivia inaugurated the 21st century with a string of revolts that questioned the political, economic, and social model that had prevailed in the country for decades. The political crises that Bolivia has experienced since the beginning of the 21st century stem from the existence within the country of two opposing projects whose contradictions are manifested both on the political, economic, and social levels. Although the years of the Morales government brought a relative stability favoured by the economic bonanza generated by the income coming from commodities, the truth is that this stability concealed a deep gap between two blocs that would end up exploding in 2019. The fight for power among these projects has plunged Bolivia into political chaos on two occasions, one during 2008 and the other, most recent, in 2019. This article aims to analyse the existing gap in Bolivia between the East and the West and the effects it has had and may have on the present and future stability of the country. To this end, the article will begin by pointing out the complex geographic configuration of Bolivia and its impact on its political, economic and social development. The second section will be dedicated to knowing how the autonomist movement has been articulated and developed in eastern Bolivia. Next, we will point out the levels in which the fracture of Bolivian society is reflected. That cleavage has led to the creation of two power blocs in the country, and it will be described to later make a brief analysis of the 2008 and 2019 crises. Finally, an assessment of the country's current situation after the 2020 and 2021 elections will be made.

The effects of Bolivian geography

The geographical configuration of Bolivia has been, since its independence, a complex challenge for the political and economic development of the country. Located in the centre of South America, landlocked after the defeat in the Pacific War and with an extreme orography, Bolivia has traditionally had serious problems to create a compact national unit. As we will see later, not only the orography has been an obstacle to the political articulation of the State, but also the ethnic heterogeneity and the contrasts between the different areas of the country have deepened the internal cleavages.

Bolivia's territory covers an area of 1,098,581 km², and it shares borders with Brazil, Peru, Chile, Argentina and Paraguay. The current configuration of Bolivia is the result of the political events that shook the country for almost a century. From 1867 to 1935 Bolivia suffered a constant amputation of its territory, losing almost 50% of the territory inherited from the Real Audiencia de Charcas in 1825. Every one of its neighbours swallowed, to a greater or lesser extent, a part of Bolivia, depriving it of its access to the sea and hindering their river access to the Amazon and Platin basins.

Two elements stand out from the geographical configuration of Bolivia. The first one is the Andean plateau, which occupies around 40% of the territory. In that area was located the political and economic centre of gravity until the second half of the 20th century. The second one is the vast territory in the eastern part known as the Llanos that covers almost 60% of the country. This region of the Llanos is divided into a north and northwest slope influenced by the Amazon basin and Brazil and a south and southeast part influenced by the Plata basin. Bolivia's centre of gravity has been since its independence the Andean plateau thanks to its greater demographic power, its mining wealth and its greater proximity to the Pacific ports. The eastern periphery of the country suffered a secular neglect by the central state and only from the 1950s did it begin to integrate politically and economically into the state¹.

Geopolitical studies have seen in Bolivia a geographical aberration whose territorial dispersion in various geopolitical zones carried the seeds of its own disintegration and amputation throughout the last third of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th. Thus, for Carlos Badía Malagrida, Bolivia would be nothing more than a conglomerate of territories that "far from forming a proper geographical unit, constitutes a conglomerate of three natural regions, different from each other, and belonging to as many units with their own substantive value: the Andes, the Plata basin and the Amazon"².

For centuries the Bolivian population was concentrated in the large cities of the Andean plateau: Chuquisaca (now Sucre), Cochabamba, Oruro, Potosí or La Paz, while in the rest of the territory the scarce population allowed the penetration of foreigners who began to exploit the raw materials of Bolivia. Such was the situation in Bolivia that José María

¹ ROCA, José Luis. *Fisonomía del regionalismo boliviano*. La Paz. 1999

² BADÍA, Carlos. *El factor geográfico en la política sudamericana*. Madrid: Instituto Editorial Reus. 1946. p 163.

Dalence went so far as to point out that "of this vast area, three-quarters at least and without dispute, the best and most fertile, are depopulated and uncultivated"³. This demographic weakness in the periphery explains, along with other reasons, the great territorial losses that Bolivia suffered with Brazil or Chile. The terrible consequences of the secular abandonment of the territory by the Bolivian authorities had their culminating point in the War of the Pacific in which Chile deprived Bolivia of its only direct access to the sea, landlocking the country, marking its historical evolution and weighing on its economic development. The Andean-centric vision of the successive Bolivian governments generated a sense of abandonment in the East that ended up building a political and historical consciousness because of that isolation, initiating a centrifugal trend in the peripheral regions.

Along with the lack of political and economic articulation of the country, Bolivia has experienced little or no social integration over the centuries. The Andean country is very diverse, the Aymara and Quechua are the main ethnic groups in the plateau and the Guaraní ethnic group is predominant in the east of the country. The independence of the country did nothing but entrench the harmful social dynamics that already existed during the colonial era, which meant that the creole class continued to steer the course of the country, imposing its will, and protecting its interests against an indigenous majority that did not have any type of connection with the State. The non-existence of a national construction effort by the elites at the social and territorial level took a terrible toll on the Bolivian State and generated centrifugal tendencies in the eastern regions whose drives have oscillated between a push for a limited autonomy and a clear independence movement. These disintegrating outbursts occurred throughout the 19th century with limited episodes of rebellion but will acquire increasing strength after the 1952 National Revolution, becoming from that moment on a powerful political and economic force whose interests have destabilized the country on several occasions.

The development of the Eastern crescent

The autonomist upheavals in eastern Bolivia began at the end of the 19th century. The rebellion of Andrés Ibáñez in 1876-1877 was followed, in 1891, by the so-called

³ DALENCE, José. María. *Bosquejo Estadístico de Bolivia*. Chuquisaca: Imprenta de Sucre, 1851. p. 2.

“Domingo’s rebellion” promoted by Domingo Ardaya and José Domingo Ávila who tried to establish the Federal States of the East. Both rebellions were crushed by the central authorities. However, the origin of a block led by Santa Cruz de la Sierra accompanied by the departments of Tarija, Beni and Pando can be found in the first days of Bolivia’s connection with the foreign markets.

After the burst of the first rubber bubble in the last decades of the 19th century, the eastern authorities began to demand greater investment by the State to connect Santa Cruz with the rest of Bolivia and its trading partners to offload their output. In 1868 the people of Santa Cruz drew up a memorandum regretting the state of the region, stating that “the Department of Santa Cruz, despite the inexhaustible exuberance of its fertile soil, languishes due to the lack of communication channels to make it easy to contact the outside world”⁴. The grievances of the eastern population were again highlighted with the drafting of another memorandum in 1904 to promote the creation of a railway from Cochabamba to Santa Cruz. This document stated that “a long and painful experience of more than 70 years has persuaded us that the western peoples of the Andean region, whose interests are more or less in solidarity with each other, do not take into account the interests and progress of the eastern peoples”⁵. Tensions between Santa Cruz and the central power gradually increased, and several insurrections were carried out during the 1920s. During the Chaco War, the loyalty of the city of Santa Cruz to Bolivia was questioned. Within the territory there was a minority political current who was in favour of taking advantage of the war to achieve independence⁶.

The situation in the east would remain stagnant until the arrival of the Bohan mission in 1942. The Bohan Plan sought to connect Santa Cruz with the rest of Bolivia, to develop its industry and diversify its sources of growth, to mechanize its agricultural operations through credits and to promote the export of its agricultural output. However, the projects could not be fulfilled until 1952.

In 1950, a particularly relevant event for the development of the eastern movement took

⁴ Memorandum de 1868. Available at: <https://www.comiteprosantacruz.org.bo/documento/memorandum-1868/>

⁵ Sociedad de Estudios Geográficos e Históricos de Santa Cruz de la Sierra. *Memorandum*, septiembre 1904. Available at: <https://www.comiteprosantacruz.org.bo/documento/memorandum-de-1904/>

⁶ PRUDEN, Hernán. Santa Cruz de la Sierra: de campañas separatistas y proyectos integracionistas, entre las postrimerías y la posguerra del Chaco (1935-1939). RES GESTA, n. 54, 2018. Instituto de Historia. UCA Rosario.

place with the creation of the Pro Santa Cruz Civic Committee. From that moment on it was going to be the fundamental pillar of Santa Cruz's political power. Not only will the Committee be important when it comes to placing a set of institutions and economic groups under the same umbrella, it will also be key when it comes to disseminating the idea of a “Cruceñidad”, that is, an identity separated from the rest of Bolivia based on historical, economic, ethnic, social and cultural factors⁷. Seven years later, the Unión Juvenil Cruceñista, described as the armed wing of the Committee, was founded. The first relevant action of both institutions took place during the ‘11% struggles’ that confronted President Siles Zuazo with the eastern movement. These focused on the demands by the department of Santa Cruz to get 11% of the royalties obtained from the exploitation of hydrocarbon deposits located in the region. The civic struggles continued until 1959 with the political demobilization of the Civic Committee and the Unión Juvenil Cruceñista.

During the following decades, the economic and demographic take-off of the eastern departments would take place as a result of the reforms and investments in infrastructures that promoted the creation of an agribusiness sector strongly connected with global markets. The growth of Santa Cruz took place during the Banzer dictatorship from 1971 to 1978⁸. The economic change that took place in the eastern territory of Bolivia in the final three decades of the 20th century spurred the Bolivian east to rethink its place within the state structure. Indeed, Santa Cruz and the rest of the eastern departments saw their economic weight increase within the Bolivian economy, transforming the once forgotten regions into an economic powerhouse increasingly connected with global markets. Currently Santa Cruz represents 32.6% of the Bolivian GDP while the rest of the Media Luna departments would add another 11.5% of the GDP⁹. In addition to its economic importance, Santa Cruz also has an important demographic and territorial weight as it is the most populated and largest department. This progressive transition made the Pro Santa Cruz Committee and the political and economic leadership begin to demand a greater quota of autonomy and self-government in order to manage the so-called

⁷ Groups such as the Eastern Agricultural Chamber/Cámara Agropecuaria del Oriente (CAO), the Rancher Federation of Santa Cruz/Federación de Ganaderos de Santa Cruz (FEGASACRUZ) or the Industry, Trade, Commerce, Services and Tourism Chamber of Santa Cruz/Cámara de Industria, Comercio, Servicios y Turismo de Santa Cruz (CAINCO).

⁸ Hugo Bánzer was born in the Department of Santa Cruz.

⁹ Ministerio de Desarrollo Productivo y Economía Plural. Estado económico y productivo del Departamento. Santa Cruz. Available at: https://siip.produccion.gob.bo/noticias/files/BI_2309202096911_SantaCruz.pdf

"cruceño model".

Along with a greater aspiration to self-government, Santa Cruz began to develop, in the 2000s, a 'camba' identity movement that has its roots in history and that has a cultural and biological component. According to its theorists, this Camba nation has a "Spanish and indigenous origin, with the occasional influence from other cultures; a new nation that gave its own response to the environment in which it developed, CAMBA NATION, culturally or biologically speaking"¹⁰. In November 2000, the Camba Nation Autonomist Movement was created, their twelve proposals revolve around greater decentralization and autonomy for the regions and departments of Bolivia. For the Camba Nation Movement, the east "constitutes 'the other version' of Bolivia and [...] aspires to achieve the radical autonomy of this oppressed nation"¹¹.

This interest in creating and shaping a new identity and greater autonomy will coincide with a scenario of growing instability due to the collapse of the State and the emergence of social movements whose model is totally opposite to that preferred by the eastern regions. At the beginning of the 21st century, there will be a cycle of extreme instability in Bolivia that began with the "water war" in Cochabamba, followed by the blockades in La Paz and the "gas war". In this scenario of high political volatility, the indigenous social movements led by Evo Morales and Felipe Quispe flourished, and were harbingers of the overwhelming victory of the former in the 2005 elections.

The emergence of the blocks

On January 19, Felipe Quispe "el Mallku" died in El Alto, he was a key leader in the indigenous peoples' struggle against what he considered the white-mestizo Bolivia that oppressed the native population. In his article "In Bolivia there are two Bolivias" Quispe pointed out that "there is a Bolivia, a very small dominant colonial minority, that lives better than the rest. On the other hand, the other Bolivia, that of the Indians, does not yet know that paradigm of 'living well'"¹².

¹⁰ GANDARILLA GUARDIA, Nino. *Observaciones y rectificaciones al Capítulo Primero de "Autonomías departamentales"*. Editorial Enfoques Juveniles. Bolivia. 1992

¹¹ NACIÓN CAMBA. Quienes Somos. Available at: <https://nacioncamba.org/quienes-somos/>

¹² QUISPE HUANCA, Felipe. EN BOLIVIA HAY DOS BOLIVIAS. Available at: <https://jichha.blogspot.com/2019/12/en-bolivia-hay-dos-bolivias.html?m=1>

In the 2000s the two opposing blocks developed contradictory projects for the country and their differences were reflected in several levels. On the one hand, the cycle of instability ushered in by the progressive deterioration of the Bolivian State was the perfect breeding ground for the indigenous social movements. They took advantage of the regional opposition to the neoliberal model, the existing union structures and their internal organization and they benefited from the tailwinds created by the electoral victories of leftist parties across Latin America. Those conditions helped the Bolivian social movements to prevail at the polls in 2005. Once in power, this indigenous movement gave the country a new direction. The re-founding of the Bolivian State, which went from being a national state to a plurinational one, the application of policies to reinforce and support the most disenfranchised population, greater access to power quotas for the indigenous population, and an Andean identarian nationalism as well as a new economic model with a greater presence of the State were some of the structural changes that took place in Bolivia since 2005.

In order to see more clearly the contradictions between both models, we are going to separate their differences on several levels: First, the models have a strong territorial component whose dividing lines are located in the division between the western part of the country and the eastern plains and the division between the rural areas and the city. Second, the economic model also divides the projects between one in which communitarianism and the State have a preponderant role and another in which capitalism, the free market prevails and the non-interference of the State in the economy is preferred. Finally, the last division is established based on the predominant ethnic component in each block, between the 'colla' identity of the Andean west and the 'camba' identity in the eastern plains.

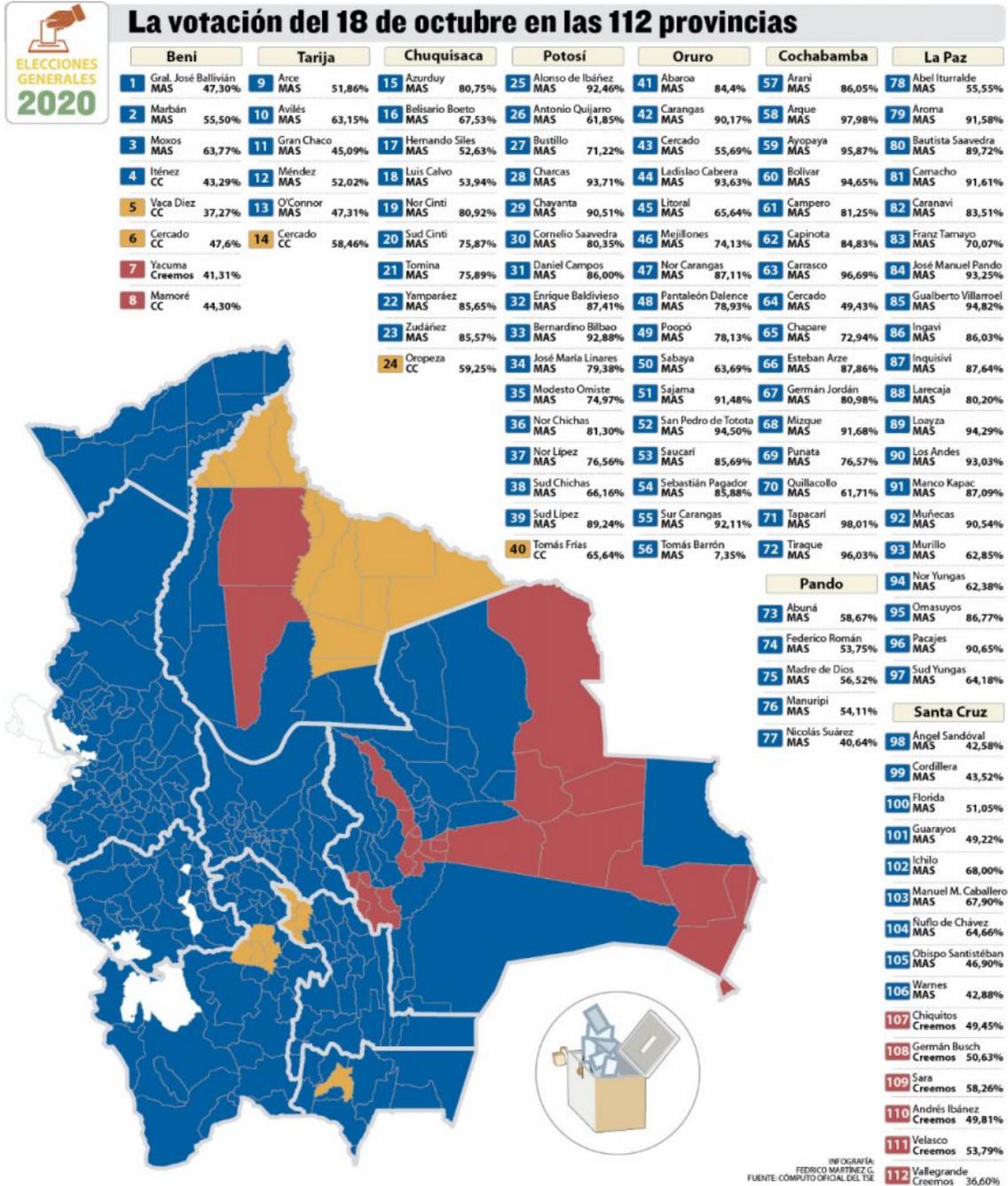


Figure 1. Electoral map of Bolivia in the 2020 election. Source. La Razón.

The territorial division can be seen in the electoral results in recent years. For example, in the national referendum on January 25, 2009 to approve the current Bolivian constitution there was a clear difference between the Andean and the eastern departments. While in the former, the ‘Yes’ to the new constitution reached figures between 64.91% (Cochabamba) and 80.07% (Potosí) in the eastern departments, the ‘No’ won with figures ranging from 56.66% in Tarija up to 67.33% in Beni. In the same

way, in the last elections won by the 'Masista' candidate, Luis Arce, the Andean regions continued to be the stronghold of the MAS' victory. On the contrary, the party most identified with 'Cruceñismo', the 'Creemos' party, led by Luis Fernando Camacho, obtained its best results in two of the eastern crescent departments, in the department of Santa Cruz and in Beni¹³.

With the accession to power of the MAS in 2005, the Bolivian economic model left neoliberalism behind, moving to a neo-developmental model in which the State has played a key role. This statism was manifested in the reversal in the privatization of natural resources that took place during the 1980s and 1990s through their nationalization and a greater role for YPFB¹⁴ in various sectors such as exploration, transportation, and storage of hydrocarbons. The new direction in the Bolivian economy has meant a renewed impulse of the public sector in the economy through the promotion of public investment and the expansion of the activity of public companies such as Boliviana de Aviación or the Corporación Minera Boliviana. In the same way, the State has been an essential pillar in granting lands to indigenous and peasant communities.

Obviously, this new economic model has not been to the liking of a part of the population and of the eastern political and economic elites whose project is based on the so-called 'Cruceño development model' that has sustained the region's growth for decades, placing it as one of the economic powerhouses of Bolivia¹⁵. This liberal model has its roots in the isolation of the region, which for decades has had to find the sources of its growth in its own resources and its own initiatives. Private and individual entrepreneurship has the leading role in this model, limiting the participation of the State in the market. In addition, it is a model based on the existence of large estates whose production is mainly directed abroad, which is why it flatly rejects both the nationalization of land and its distribution to small farmers, as well as export restrictions and price controls.

Finally, the third level of discord between the power blocks has the ethnic factor at its core. Sergio Antelo, former president of the Civic Committee, pointed out in his work 'Los

¹³ Misión de observación electoral de la Unión Europea. INFORME FINAL Referéndum Nacional Constituyente 25 de enero de 2009. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/eueom/missions/2009/bolivia/pdf/eueom_bolivia_2009_final_report_es.pdf

¹⁴ Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos

¹⁵ Modelo de desarrollo cruceño. Available at: <https://www.comiteprosantacruz.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2.pdf>

Cruceños y su derecho a la autodeterminación" that "Bolivia is not and cannot be considered unitary or uni-ethnic, since it was (dis)organized on the basis of two pseudo-founding and antagonistic peoples, who were not consulted: The Qollas as the true high-peruvians located in the Andean plateau at 4 thousand meters above sea level, and the Camba people of Amazonian and Chaco origin and linked by cultural ties and by history to the Provinces of the Río de la Plata"¹⁶. The dispute between the East and the West has the confrontation between the majority indigenous population in the country and concentrated mainly in Andean Bolivia and a white-mestizo population, the 'Whiteoid Bolivia' of Quispe's speech, predominant in the Bolivian plains as a background. According to Ángel Sandoval, one of the founders of Nación Camba, the inhabitants of the east "constitute a social and ethno-historical entity with its own characteristics, since they are all mestizos, whites and blacks who inhabit eastern Bolivia, coming from the miscegenation of indigenous and Spanish people"¹⁷.

These differences at the political and economic level generated a tense relationship between the central government and the eastern elites who feared losing their position and didn't want to see their interests damaged. The confrontation between the two blocks was on the rise during the first years of the Evo Morales government reaching its climax in 2008. Disputes around the constitutional project and the legislative initiatives of the MAS to reduce the departments' income coming from the exploitation of hydrocarbons reserves gave arguments to the eastern autonomist leaders led by the president of the Santa Cruz Civic Committee, Branko Marinkovic, to initiate a series of autonomist referendums contrary to the constitution. The situation led to a series of strikes in the east and violent clashes between supporters and opponents of the MAS. The conflict between the eastern regions and the central government reached such magnitude that UNASUR had to step in to resolve the crisis. The 2008 crisis was a critical moment for the Morales government, which emerged strengthened from the event, allowing it to launch its new constitutional project with broad support from Bolivia's society. The experience of 2008 forced the eastern crescent to take a step back in their claims. They understood that direct confrontation with the State was not an adequate path for their claims. A part of the eastern elite embarked on a process of détente and progressive cooperation with the

¹⁶ ANTELO, Sergio. *Los cruceños y su derecho de libre determinación*. Santa Cruz. Imprenta Landivar, 2003, p. 139.

¹⁷ SANDOVAL RIBERA, Ángel (ed.). *La Nación Camba*. Santa Cruz. 2001, p. 7.

Morales government. This responded more to a tactical alliance to try to preserve its position while reorganizing than to a true political and economic conversion¹⁸.

Bolivia's political and economic stability after the 2008 crisis was accompanied by an improvement in macroeconomic and social indicators. However, this stability masked serious problems that had not been solved. The political situation began to deteriorate in 2016. The final results of the February 21st constitutional referendum were contrary to the government's plans, defeated by the "No" option which received 51.3% of the votes, thus closing the door to a re-election of Morales. The "No" ended up prevailing in all the eastern crescent departments, being rejected by 60% in Santa Cruz, Tarija and Beni. However, the Constitutional Court in 2017 and the Electoral Court in 2018 endorsed the candidacy of Morales and his vice president Álvaro García Linera, opening the door to another re-election¹⁹. The efforts of the ruling party and Morales to cling to power ended up waking up a part of Bolivia that, despite the passing of the years, never felt comfortable with the political and economic direction of the country and with the social transformations that took place since 2005. The 2019 election day was marked by accusations of fraud and Morales' victory was not accepted by the opposition alleging failures in the vote count and other irregularities. The polarization led the country to a state of social confrontation between opposition and pro-government organizations, leading on several occasions to violent clashes between groups, roadblocks and assaults of party headquarters and electoral offices. Meanwhile, the OAS observation mission indicated its "deep concern and surprise at the drastic and difficult to justify change in the trend of preliminary results" and the government began to denounce the existence of a coup supported by the United States and Brazil.

From Santa Cruz emerged Luis Fernando Camacho, president of the Civic Committee, a figure who managed to lead the protests, leaving the main opposition candidate, Carlos Mesa, in the background. The pressure of the protests encouraged by the OAS report on possible electoral fraud, the loss of support from organizations such as the Confederación Obrera Boliviana, the successive police riots, and the suggestion by the Armed Forces that Morales should leave power forced him to abandon his country. Inside Bolivia, a

¹⁸ ESPINOZA, Fran. *Bolivia: La Circulación de sus Élités (2006-2014)*. Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Editorial El País, 2015.

¹⁹ Tribunal Constitucional Plurinacional. Sentencia 084/2017. Available at: [https://buscador.tcpbolivia.bo/_buscador/\(S\(tojlg1hhrgdjijewmjb205mj\)\)/WfrJurisprudencia1.aspx](https://buscador.tcpbolivia.bo/_buscador/(S(tojlg1hhrgdjijewmjb205mj))/WfrJurisprudencia1.aspx)

power vacuum ensued with the resignations of Álvaro García Linera, Víctor Borda and Adriana Salvatierra²⁰. Finally, the position of president of Bolivia fell on Jeanine Áñez, the second vice-president of the Senate, in a session of Parliament in which the MAS did not participate due to its rejection of what they called a “coup d'état”.

The assumption of the Bolivian Presidency by Jeanine Áñez, a politician coming from Beni, one of the eastern crescent departments, initiated a counterrevolutionary process to dismantle the apparatus built by the MAS since 2005²¹²². The initiatives of the Áñez government represented an exercise of political balancing with actions carried out to reverse some MAS initiatives (agricultural export liberalization, withdrawal of subsidies for hydrocarbons, changes in ministries and public companies) but Áñez also kept some of the MAS' projects and programs in order not to antagonize a high percentage of the population that benefits from them. In terms of foreign policy, there was a radical change in which the country was repositioned outside the sphere of the Latin American left abandoning ALBA, approaching the Lima group, and recognizing the state of Israel or Juan Guaidó as president of Venezuela, among other initiatives.

Despite the demoralization of the MAS during the first weeks and the momentum that the revolution promoted from the east had given to the Áñez government, the new government began to accumulate mistakes (attacking the traditional indigenous flag and some episodes of police violence). One of the most serious mistakes was Áñez's candidacy for the elections. We must bear in mind that the theory that underpinned the government's strategy was that if the MAS was evicted from power and deprived of government levers, the ‘masista’ hegemony was bound to disappear. With this premise, the unity of the forces that had overthrown Morales began to break down as the vote was divided into several candidates. From Santa Cruz, Camacho presented himself as the one who expelled Morales and who would guarantee a Bolivia without the MAS. Once Santa Cruz opted for Camacho, the candidacy of Carlos Mesa was mortally wounded. The cases of corruption and the economic crisis caused by covid-19 ended up demolishing the image of a government that could not build a narrative and an alternative

²⁰ Vice-president, Speaker of Congress and Speaker of the Senate respectively.

²¹ MOLINA, Fernando. Bolivia: ¿golpe o (contra)revolución? Noviembre 2019. Available at: <https://nuso.org/articulo/bolivia-golpe-o-contrarevolucion/>

²² MAMANI RAMÍREZ, Pablo. Wiphalas, luchas y la nueva nación. Relatos, análisis y memorias de octubre-noviembre de 2019 desde El Alto, Cochabamba y Santa Cruz. Available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bolivien/16622-20201119.pdf>

political project to that of the MAS. The October 2020 elections restored the MAS to power. The leftist party knew how to reconfigure itself and take advantage of the multiple mistakes made by the interim government.

Bolivia's future

The events that have taken place in Bolivia since the end of 2019 are the result of the complexity and heterogeneity of the country and its society and have generated a turmoil that seemed to have been buried after the period of stability opened in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. Democratic normality has returned after the 2020 and 2021 electoral cycle, but the truth is that the factors that have created the cleavage analysed in this article are still present and the measures taken by the governments of Jeanine Áñez and Luis Arce have widened, rather than reducing, the gap within Bolivia's society²³.

Both the 2020 presidential elections and the 2021 sub-national elections have demonstrated the continuity of a political model characterized by the existence of two blocks incapable of reaching lasting agreements due to the aforementioned contradictions and by the incapacity of either bloc to establish a permanent hegemony over the other. That is going to chronically embed instability in the country. The preventive detention of former President Áñez and several of her ministers accused of carrying out a coup in 2019 will only make impossible any agreement between the different political formations to lessen the society's polarization.

The opposition to the MAS, defeated at the polls, has decided, as in 2008, to dig in again in its regional fiefdoms and in the big cities. Proof of this is the victory of Iván Arias in La Paz and Luis Fernando Camacho and his platform 'Creemos' in Santa Cruz. The victory of the latter will surely be a first step towards his nomination as a presidential candidate in the next elections. In this way, the eastern crescent will have a reference in the figure of Camacho. However, despite Camacho's first-round victory, the opposition has a very difficult road ahead. First, because of the non-existence of a national structure neither on the part of the 'Comunidad Ciudadana' nor on the part of 'Creemos' to challenge a well-established MAS throughout the national territory. Second, it remains to be seen if

²³ "Comité cívico convoca para este lunes a una protesta contra las persecuciones", *El Deber*. Available at: https://eldeber.com.bo/santa-cruz/comite-civico-convoca-para-este-lunes-a-una-protesta-contra-las-persecuciones_224257

Camacho's leadership is limited to exerting its influence in Santa Cruz and the rest of the eastern crescent or if it is capable of articulating and building a national project attractive enough to appeal to an important electoral mass. Be that as it may, the Bolivian east will continue to be a source of instability for the national government to the extent that it has the necessary means, as it has already demonstrated in 2008 and 2019, to put La Paz up against the ropes.

As for President Luis Arce, he faces an already very complex scenario. The covid-19 pandemic has made his position even more delicate due to the notable impact that the crisis is having in Bolivia and, in general, in South America. Although the fight against the pandemic takes all the attention, the truth is that the great challenge of the Bolivian government will be to find a way through which to close the existing gap in the country given that no block will be able to govern by perpetually cornering the contrary. If this continues, Bolivian politics will find itself plunged into a continuous back and forth of revolts of both signs with a severe impact on its democratic system.

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