

# Why Lucho & David won the Bolivian elections

Tuesday 20 October 2020, by [SOLÓN Pablo](#) (Date first published: 19 October 2020).

**The Movement towards Socialism (MAS in Spanish) has won the Bolivian elections in the first round this October 2020. Two exit polls (Ciesmori and Tu Voto Cuenta) based on different samples argued that Luis Arce “Lucho” and David Choquehuanca had obtained more than 50% of the votes and have a difference of more than 20% of the votes versus the second: Carlos Mesa of the Citizens Community (CC). We still have to wait for the results of the official count that will be available on Wednesday or Thursday, but the trend of the results of these two exit polls will hardly change in a substantive way.**

## Why did Lucho and David won?

1) The disastrous short-lived government of Jeanine Añez. In less than a year the government of Añez was involved in several cases of corruption and nepotism in the middle of the quarantine. Management of the pandemic and the economy was extremely bad. In the midst of the suffering of the people the old politicians who had returned to power did not waste a second in trying to fill their pockets. In the style of the previous MAS government, anyone who initiated investigations against Minister Murillo and those around Añez was dismissed and persecuted. In 10 months, there were countless changes of ministers and authorities. The Añez government showed with glaring examples that an opposition government could be even worse than the MAS government that had already suffered loss of credibility from its own cases of corruption.

2) The pandemic aggravated the economic crisis that was already underway. Monetary stability was maintained, but the real economy suffered a severe blow that fell mainly on people who live from day to day in the informal economy. The fear that this economic situation will worsen, and the hope that the economic bonanza dole outs will return with a new MAS government headed by its former finance minister.

3) The 2020 election was not a choice of proposals, but rather of fears and socio-cultural identification processes. The programs of MAS and CC have more coincidences than differences and in general they are widely unknown by the voters. The attacks by the government of Añez, Murillo and Camacho made MAS a “victim” and aroused the deepest fears of broad sectors of the population with indigenous roots that discrimination against them would rise. The right wing was betting on the fear of non-MAS voters of the return of the delegitimized Evo Morales. On the other hand, MAS fueled fear of the return of the racist neoliberal right and a return to economic instability. Mesa and CC did not seek to understand or approach the world of the popular indigenous peoples.

4) The Añez government, far from restoring the rule of law and the clarification of serious events such as the deaths of Senkata and Sacaba, used justice to exercise revenge. Far from insisting on a reconciliation process and a minimal agreement between all the political forces to confront the pandemic, it tried, like its predecessor, to perpetuate itself in government by using State resources in a frustrated candidacy.

5) The ecocide of 2019 was repeated in 2020 with the burning of millions of hectares of forests. Far from repealing the incendiary decrees in time, the Añez government gave even more benefits to the agribusiness sector: abbreviated procedure for the approval of more GMOs, unlimited export of agricultural products that contribute to deforestation, opening for commercial plantations of eucalyptus and others. The Evo government was indeed allied to the agribusiness sector and had given concessions well before the change in government; however, the Añez government was not only allied to agribusiness, they were deeply entrenched in the business and represented their interests in the making of these new even more expansive policies.

6) Carlos Mesa and CC bet on inertia. They believed that the scenario of the 2019 elections had continued, polarized by the possible reelection of Evo Morales, in which the electoral flow of CC grew due to the anti-MAS vote rather than due to an attachment to his campaign. The pandemic, and the economic, social and environmental crisis did not lead them to rethinking their strategy, an approach to popular organizations. They were expecting that at the last-minute the people would vote again for them, something that did not happen because the setting and the actors had changed.

7) MAS did not win because of Evo but in spite of Evo. Evo wanted to marginalize David Choquehuanca, a genuine indigenous person, who is the candidate chosen by the indigenous social organizations of the highlands and valleys. The triumph of the MAS was overwhelming in the rural areas of these regions largely due to David's candidacy. It would have been a completely different result if MAS had gone with the Lucho-Pari pairing, if Evo Morales had succeeded to impose from his exile. After almost a decade, the indigenous social organizations of the highlands and the valleys pushed for a democratic determination from the grassroots in the choice of their candidates. As they had originally pushed for David as their candidate for President, versus Evo and allies pushing from above to disenfranchise David, the grassroots push from below forced a compromise with Evo and allies that allowed for their candidate David to be the Vice President candidate and Lucho as Presidential candidate. The result of the 2020 elections show that in 2019, MAS could have won the elections with no difficulty or the need for blatant electoral fraud, if it would have not insisted on the unconstitutional reelection of Evo Morales.

8) The victory of the MAS in the 2020 elections does not represent a blank check. As Luis Arce himself recognized, after the results of the exit polls, there are several errors in the previous MAS government that must be corrected. The question is: which errors are he referring to and will his government be able to correct them and initiate a renewed second phase of the process of change? The electoral result also doesn't mean that what happened in 2019 was simply a conspiracy mounted by the right, nor does it represent a pure and simple victory for international progressivism. Different leaders of indigenous peasant social organizations have expressed deep criticism of the traditional behavior of the left and their strategies of seizing power. Furthermore, the practice of supposedly progressive left leaders doing everything in their power to stay in power rather than training and pulling up other movement members to achieve their potential needs deep review and reflection by these organizations. Again, these elections show that MAS had more support when MAS had presented candidates chosen from the grassroots.

### **What can happen with the government of Lucho and David?**

9) The key to relaunch the process of change relays not so much in the future government but in the capacity of self-determination and autonomy of social organizations and their ability to resume a course of alternative proposals at all levels. This implies having the ability to see beyond their immediate demands, propose a strategy for Bolivia that exceeds the exhausted Agenda of October 2003, and re-articulate alliances with urban social sectors.

10) The government of Lucho and David will not be a simple repetition of the government of Evo

Morales because the scenario is different and the power relations within MAS have changed since Evo's departure. Currently the future MAS government is already a space in dispute. Evo Morales and those around him will make every effort to control the government, which implies cornering or re-co-opting the social organizations that support David Choquehuanca. The fate of the balance will be for the moment Luis Arce who does not want to be a puppet, but neither does he have a trajectory of autonomy in relation to Evo. The distribution of positions and quotas of power will be a very difficult factor to overcome for the leaders of social organizations accustomed during the last decade to the patronage politics developed by Evo Morales. The next few months will be decisive to see how the forces within the MAS government and the social organizations are realigned.

11) The future government will suffer rapid wear due to the severity of the economic crisis. The decrease in international reserves, the pressure of the devaluations of the currencies of neighboring countries, and the decline in the economy make it impossible for the MAS government to fulfill its promise of stability, economic growth and address the countless demands of the population. The recipe, applied since 2015, of injecting money into the economy through public investment with resources from the external debt and international reserves, is not sustainable in the short term. This is the moment to rethink and discuss openly the way forward to overcome the extractivist economy that the government of Evo Morales had encouraged.

12) The new MAS government needs to promote a process of reconciliation and unity of all Bolivians. This is not possible without dialogue and consensus-building processes. However, the process that can occur, as what happened in the past, was gaining consensus from the right through the distribution of concessions to agribusiness, banking, mining and other sectors of power. Or through a process of convergence based on the 2009 Constitution. The government may end up deepening the course in favor of GMOs, biofuels, the export of meat at any cost or can resume the path of fulfilling the Social Economic Function for big land owners, the rights of Mother Earth and the effective promotion of agroecology in Bolivia. At present, while Luis Arce promotes the massive production of biofuels as a strategic pillar, David Choquehuanca questions the expansion of GMOs.

13) The independence and separation of State powers is another crucial issue. The orientation of Evo Morales and those that surround him is to control all the State powers to avoid processes against them and to use them against their adversaries. The control and submission of the justice, the parliament, the electoral court, the comptroller's office, the ombudsman and the media have been characteristic of the government of Evo Morales. If Lucho and David maintain that trajectory, they will soon see the emergence of a great resistance by the citizen movement.

14) Avoiding cases of corruption from now on and at the same time, prosecuting cases of corruption during the government of Evo Morales is a key issue. The population will have less patience with the government of Luis Arce and David Choquehuanca than with Evo in relation to cases of corruption. One thing is the perception of corruption in times of prosperity and another one is in times of acute crisis.

15) During the past MAS governments, a new bourgeoisie emerged associated with the state bureaucracy, contracts with the state, trade, smuggling, mining cooperatives and the production of coca leaves linked to drug trafficking. These new sectors of power ended up influencing several of the main determinations of the government of Evo Morales. To counteract these new elites, the key is to strengthen the capacity of autonomy, proposition and self-determination of existing and emerging social movements.

A fundamental issue is whether the whole of Bolivian society will be able to make ethics and real process of change prevail over political pragmatism. Without this, there is no future. The decisions that the future government will have to make will be very difficult. It will only be possible to face this

situation if there is a wide, sincere and transparent discussion within social organizations and society as a whole.

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