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## Bolivia, Venezuela Vote Again

**Carlos Macias**  
January 21, 2009

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Bolivians vote January 25 in a constitutional referendum. (AP Photo)

Venezuela [participate](#) in their own referendum on whether their president can seek indefinite reelection powers.

The prelude to Bolivia's Sunday vote reflected the deep divide among the country's citizens in terms of how the country should move forward. In 2008, [autonomy votes](#) in four departments sparked violent protests. But a recall vote in August [reaffirmed](#) Morales' legitimacy. An October [compromise](#) between government supporters and opposition leaders—accompanied by multiple changes to the draft of the constitution—paved the way for this month's vote. A December [poll](#) conducted by Observatorio de Gestión Pública showed that 65 percent of Bolivians plan to vote in favor of the new constitution, with 16 percent against it and 19 percent undecided.

The Cochabamba-based Democracy Center [outlines top issues](#) dealt with in the 411 articles of the new constitution, from reelection to land reform. The document would allow Morales to seek reelection once, open the door to government takeover of unused tracts of land, limit the amount of land that could be purchased, set up risk-sharing arrangements for private oil firms, and guarantee access to social security. The [Organization of American States](#), the [European Union](#), and [Mercosur](#) plan to dispatch monitors to ensure transparency at the polls.

In his blog Pronto, Bolivian political scientist Miguel Centellas warns about the political fractures running through Bolivia and notes that, even though Morales won the recall vote by a wider margin than he won the presidential election, his support dropped in eastern and southern departments. "As the date of the referendum approaches, [new political divisions are emerging](#)," writes Centellas. Leaders of [Bolivia's evangelical movement](#), previously supportive of Morales, have come down on the side of "no" on the constitution, citing opposition to provisions they say encourage abortion and homosexuality. Furthermore, indigenous political leaders once aligned with Morales' party Movimiento al Socialismo and former President Carlos Meza joined the voices against the document. Morales has [accused](#) his detractors of

## Upcoming Programs

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Jan 27 | <a href="#">New Media, New Markets</a><br>New York  |
| Mar 12 | <a href="#">2009 Latin American Cities Conference:</a><br><a href="#">Mexico City, Mexico</a> |
| Jun 9  | <a href="#">2009 Latin American Cities Conference:</a><br><a href="#">São Paulo, Brazil</a>   |

[Calendar and Registration](#) ▶

## Past Programs

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Jan 16 | <a href="#">Private Meeting:</a><br><a href="#">Governor of the Central Bank of Brazil Henrique Meirelles</a><br>Miami                  |
| Jan 16 | <a href="#">Private Breakfast:</a><br><a href="#">Governor of the Mexican State of Guerrero Carlos Zeferino Torreblanca</a><br>New York |
| Jan 13 | <a href="#">Building the Hemispheric Growth Agenda: A New Framework for Policy</a><br>Washington  |

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## Americas Quarterly

failing to offer viable political alternatives to his proposal.

Meanwhile, in Venezuela, the electorate **voted and rejected** a new constitution in 2007, dealing a blow to Chávez's ambitions to mark Venezuela's Magna Carta with his agenda. Venezuelans will soon decide whether to allow Chávez to run for reelection indefinitely. Keeping in line with constitutional law, Chávez's Partido Socialista Unido **collected** more than 5.5 million signatures to hold the referendum. Facing the **economic impact of declining oil prices**, Chávez decided to push for the referendum as soon as possible, while his popularity continues to run high. The *Los Angeles Times* reports that, despite Chavez's high approval ratings, polls show the president **in danger of facing defeat** next month. As the February 15 vote approaches, protesters against the vote have taken to the streets. On Tuesday, marchers clashed with police, who—under Chavez's orders—used tear gas and water cannons to disrupt the marches.

The government announced that Chávez's popular Sunday television segment *Aló Presidente* **will not air** until after the referendum. However, the president will **write a new syndicated column** three times a week starting January 22.

Read AS/COA interviews with Venezuelan opposition leader **Leopoldo López** and student activist **Yon Goicoechea**.

*Send questions and comments for the editor to:*  
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