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# Coming In From the Cold

- An Institutional Perspective on the Emergence of  
Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia

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# Abstract

This is a comparative case study over time, where I investigate the rise of the party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) in Bolivia. Through a historical institutionalism perspective I look at the electoral system reform that was undertaken in Bolivia in 1994. I investigate if and how the reform contributed to the possibility of MAS to emerge at the national political arena. Through the reform, Bolivia switched from a proportional representation system to a mixed-member system. I analyse these different types of electoral systems, and use theories and hypotheses of what happens when you switch from one to another. Factors I look at are, for instance, single- and multimember districts, district magnitude and thresholds. I also see a purpose in itself of tracing the process of the electoral reform and the consequences it had for possibilities of indigenous parties to gain access to the national elections. My conclusion is that the reform did indeed help MAS to enter national politics. The main reason for this was the introduction of single-member districts; they made Bolivian politics more decentralised and enabled regionally strong indigenous parties to win seats in the national elections.

*Key words:* Bolivia, institutionalism, electoral reform, mixed-member systems, the Movimiento al Socialismo party

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Presentation

Contemporary Bolivian political life can be described as turbulent, say the least. The country's 20<sup>th</sup> century history includes a revolution in 1952 by the social nationalist party Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), that was followed by single-party rule for about a decade. Between the years 1964 and 1978 military rule held its grip of the state, with several coups and counter-coups taking place. In the 1980's Bolivia took its first shaky steps toward democratic elections, and since then, the country has had a multiparty system and has held elections with a shifting level of fairness. (Gamarra & Malloy 1995: 403ff.)

During the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century, the indigenous population had very little influence over national politics. This was about to change drastically, though. Evo Morales of indigenous descent won a landslide victory in the 2005 elections, and his party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) gained the majority of the votes. Never before had Bolivia had a president of indigenous antecedence. The victory of MAS was also historical in the sense that no single party ever before had gained absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies. (Sanchez 2008:324)

Promises of nationalisation of the country's natural resources and reforms to transfer more power to the indigenous population brought Morales the vote of the impoverished indigenous population, but it also stirred discontent among other groups of the Bolivian society. (BBC News Homepage 1) Many of those live in the wealthier, eastern parts of the country, and in May 2008 the region of Santa Cruz held a referendum on autonomy, proclaimed illegal by the government as well as by the National Electoral Court (CNE). However, about 80 per cent of the people in the province voted in favour of more autonomy. (BBC News Homepage 2) And on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 2008, the Bolivian people went to the polls for a recall vote, to give their say on whether or not they support the radical reforms of Morales. With over 60 per cent of the people voting in favour of Morales, he was given the opportunity to continue his work. But four of the regional governors who represent the oppositional eastern provinces were also given renewed mandates, and the antagonisms will surely not be solved by the results of this referendum. (Alarcón Mondonio in *La Prensa* 2008-08-11)

Bolivia thus constitutes an interesting example of a state which is following a troublesome path towards establishing how a new democracy should be organised. Many things remain to be figured out; not even the state borders are to be taken entirely for granted. One step on this path was the electoral system

reform that took place in the middle of the 1990's. The trust in the political system was very low and lack of representation, elite domination and discrimination were all problems that the reform aimed to ameliorate. But could anyone imagine the radical changes that the party system would experience the following decade? And to what extent did the electoral reform play a role in the events that followed? These are the questions I will try to shed some light on in this thesis.

## 1.2 Research Question and Aim of Thesis

The research question is formulated as follows:

*Can electoral system change contribute to the explanation of the rise of the party Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia?*

I will, through a historical institutionalism theoretical perspective, conduct a *comparative case study over time* to answer this question. The aim of the thesis is to look at theories of electoral systems, and compare these with Bolivian national elections before and after the electoral reform of 1994. The study thus contains testing of hypotheses which constitute the comparative, before-after element. However, scholars have not come to a consensus on the theories on electoral systems, and the effects that occur when you change them. Furthermore, regarding the mixed-member systems, scholars have not had many cases to study, since the appearance on broad front of mixed-member systems as an alternative to the more traditional majoritarian or proportional electoral systems is fairly recent. Therefore, this study also uses the Bolivian example to show which of these theories that can be applied to and supported by the Bolivian case. It does so by studying the specific Bolivian process of changing the electoral system.

My thesis contributes to the accumulated research by focusing solely on the connection between electoral system changes and the rise of MAS. Previous studies have mostly dealt with the electoral system change as merely one of several factors explaining the emergence of MAS, resulting in more brief analyses of the electoral reform effect.

The essay is also a contribution to research on mixed-member systems. These have become popular fairly recently and the long-term effects of such systems on national politics are yet to be seen.

## 2 Theory

### 2.1 My Starting Point: Democracy

My interest for questions concerning electoral system changes derives from the studies of different themes related to the political science sub-fields of democracy and democratization, foremost in countries that have experienced democratization processes in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The explosion of number of countries who have embarked on the path of democratization means that the field studying these processes has increased. Since many of these events are fairly recent, however, a great deal of research remains to be done.

A whole thesis could be written regarding the meaning of the term “democracy”; it is furthermore a term that could have a highly subjective meaning to each individual. One could advocate that greater elements of deliberative or direct democracy should be added to a state’s political system. One could also take a minimalist or maximalist view on democracy, stating that democracy only concerns the formal electoral institutions, or adversely, that all spheres in society should be concerned in the quest for democracy. (Linde & Ekman 2006:15-16) Robert Dahl has written extensively on values and features of democracy in theory and practice. He has listed six political institutions that large-scale democracy requires. These are: elected officials, free, fair and frequent elections, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, associational autonomy and inclusive citizenship. My essay touches on the importance of a well-functioning machinery of free, fair and frequent elections. However, it also deals with the last point on Dahl’s list, inclusive citizenship, since I investigate the inclusion of a previously excluded group into national politics. (Dahl 1998:85-86) Thus, a certain expansion toward a broader view on democracy is being made.

### 2.2 Theoretical Approach: Historical Institutionalism

The institutionalism perspective in political science has gone through, to borrow a Hegelian terminology, a sort of thesis – antithesis – synthesis development during the last fifty years or so. Formal institutions like electoral systems used to be in focus in the days of the “old institutionalism”. Beginning in the 1950s, however, the behavioralism perspective emerged with an interest in more informal features of political life, like the behaviour of political actors. When the “new

institutionalism” made its comeback on the political science arena, starting in the late 1970s, the perspectives had broadened and both formal and informal rules and procedures were of interest to researchers. This poses somewhat of a problem, as researchers do not fully agree on what constitutes an institution. (Thelen & Steinmo 1992:1-4) I shall leave this debate behind, however, since in my case the electoral system is one of the traditional, formal institutions and more than well fits into any definition.

The important question to answer here is what function institutions such as electoral systems have in a wider, political context. As Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo put it: “...institutionalists are interested in the whole range of state and societal institutions that *shape how political actors define their interests and that structure their relations of power to other groups.*” (Thelen & Steinmo 1992: 2, my italics) Thus, institutions structure political actors and groups. As a result of this, an institutional change should produce a change in those structures, possibly enabling shifts in power between groups. Consequently, since I am interested in electoral system change and the indigenously based MAS party, I want to look at *whether the electoral system change came to change the relationship of power between the indigenous movement and other political groups.*

The new institutionalism perspective has grown recently and several sub-perspectives have emerged. The historical institutionalism is one of them. What is specific about the historical institutionalism is that it places a large emphasis on the importance of historical contingencies of the phenomenon that is being studied. This makes political processes within institutional settings important study-objects in themselves, and the interpretation of empirical material can therefore lead to the generation of new hypotheses. (Thelen & Steinmo 1992:2, 7)

Scholars applying an institutional perspective often point to the fact that institutions are seldom the only cause to a specific phenomenon or event. (See Thelen & Steinmo 1992:3, Nohlen 1996:45, Morgenstern & Vázquez-D’Elía 2007:143) As pointed out above, institutions structure political groups and actors. They are therefore more often likely to be part of the underlying cause of a specific political event, while the triggering factors to such an event can, for example, be found in a sudden economic crisis or the explicit action of a politician. (Thelen & Steinmo 1992:7) Therefore, at the end of this chapter I will discuss some alternative approaches to explaining the emergence of MAS, where other aspects apart from the electoral system change have been studied.

## 2.3 Theories on Electoral Systems

The institutional perspective traditionally has regarded institutions as very stable. Electoral systems are no exception. However, this is a fact that could be challenged, if you look at them in a Latin American context. According to Karen

L. Remmer (2008:6-7), “Latin American electoral rules are notable less for their ‘stickiness’ than for their fluidity.” The reforms of 1994 in Bolivia, for example, were not the first in the country’s brief history of electoral democracy. Different electoral formulas were used in elections 1979, 1980, 1985, 1989, 1993 and 1997. The intention of this essay is not to investigate why Bolivia had an electoral system reform, although it is a very interesting question. The reason why, however, is one part of the puzzle in trying to understand how MAS could emerge as a consequence of it. The reason for the reform is also, evidently, connected to the background situation in Bolivian politics, and the negative effects that the old system created.

I will now turn to a presentation of different electoral systems, focusing on the ones that have been in use in Bolivia before and after the reform. Theories and hypotheses of their advances and setbacks will be presented. These will later on be related to the Bolivian case in the Analysis chapter.

### 2.3.1 General Presentation

“An electoral system is defined as the set of rules that regulates access to electoral competition, defines the conditions under which candidates compete, and provides a method for the translation of votes into governmental positions.”

(Morgenstern & Vázquez-D’Elía 2007:145)

“The effect of electoral systems is seen through their impact on parties.”

(Morgenstern & Vázquez-D’Elía 2007:147)

As early as in the 1950’s Maurice Duverger formulated his two famous statements about plurality and proportionality electoral systems. These have become very influential and serve as starting points for many classifications regarding electoral systems. The first statement established that “the plurality rule tends to produce a two-party system”, and the second that “proportional representation tends to lead to the formation of many independent parties”. The first one, regarding plurality systems, became known as “Duverger’s law”, Duverger himself saying in *Political Parties* that it was “the closest to a sociological law among all the generalizations suggested in this book”. The link between proportional representation and multipartism was not equally strong, but the tendency was there. (Duverger 1986:69-70, quotes himself)

The debate over which electoral system is “the best” has often circulated around these two phenomena, depending on what one argues to be the most important function that the representative democracy should fulfil. The advocates of accountability and strong governments usually prefer plurality systems, since they often lead to one-party majority governments. If you set broad representation in parliament first, then a proportional system is to be preferred. (Massicotte & Blais 2002:61) However, there are nowadays a range of different options to consider regarding institutional design, and they are all said to create the best environment to achieve a democratic society.

I will here present different theories and hypotheses about various features of electoral systems. Bolivia switched from a PR system to a mixed-member system including both PR and majoritarian features. I will therefore discuss all these systems and the consequences that they bring for the representative democratic systems they intend to create, concentrating on the features that are relevant for my case. Primarily, I will focus on theories on how different electoral systems generate possibilities and restraints for new, small parties to win seats in elections. As I stated above, the historical institutionalism perspective discards far-reaching generalisations, and stress the historical contingencies of each case to be studied. Therefore, I will place a special focus on the theories that make assumptions about how electoral systems will behave in societies sharing features that can be applied to Bolivia.

### 2.3.2 Proportional Systems

#### *Description*

Proportional Representation Systems are used in multimember districts. There are two variations: the list system and the single transferable vote. Since Bolivia uses the list system, I will focus on this type. In comparison with the first-pass-the-post system (below) this is a much more complex system, and there are far more choices that have to be made when designing this type of electoral system. Among the decisions include choices on district magnitude, seat allocation formulas, tiers, thresholds and preferences for candidates.

There are two extremes as to district magnitude. A whole country can constitute of only one district, or a district can be as small as to only elect two candidates.

The seat allocation formula determines how the seats are distributed within each district and is of a very technical/mathematical character. The most common formulas are D'Hondt, Sainte-Laguë, LR-Droop and LR-Hare (LR=Largest Remainder). They produce different degrees of proportionality. Of the two first ones, the D'Hondt formula is said to produce a higher bonus for large parties while Sainte-Laguë creates more proportionality. Of the largest remainder type, LR-Hare is the more proportional one.

Having a second (or even third) tier aims to increase proportionality between parties. Apart from the regional district seats, there are a number of seats that are distributed on a national level among the "wasted votes" of the smaller parties from the regional districts.

By threshold means that parties have to achieve a specific percentage of votes to enter parliament. The threshold can be both at a national and local level. As an example, Swedish parties need 4% of the national vote or 12% of the votes in a local district.

In multimember districts where several candidates are to be elected, there can either be a closed list where the party has decided the order of candidates, or there can be some kind of preferential voting where voters can have their say on what candidates should enter parliament. (Massicotte & Blais 2002:45-53)

### *Consequences*

Commonly, the advances of proportional representation are said to be its higher level of representation of different groups in society. Arend Lijphart has invented the term *consociational democracy* and has put forward a series of suggestions to how electoral systems should be designed in societies with ethnic cleavages. According to him, proportional systems are generally to be preferred in those types of societies. The reason for this, according to Lijphart, is that proportional representation is the best way to ensure broad representation of different groups in parliament. (Lijphart 2004:100) Massicotte and Blais (2002:62) also point to evidence showing that PR systems tend to have a higher level of correspondence between “the median ideological position in the legislature and the median ideological position of the electorate”. (Massicotte and Blais 2002:62)

However, some scholars advocate single-member districts for societies where ethnic groups are concentrated geographically. A clue to why proportional representation can be problematic in such societies is given by Lijphart himself and other scholars: According to Lijphart and Carlos H. Waisman (1996:238) and Pippa Norris (2004:94-95) the combination of high thresholds and low district magnitude can make it very difficult for small parties to enter on the political arena.

This is also agreed upon by Van Cott (2005:29-32), who furthermore has pointed out that the seat allocation formula can affect the chances of small parties entering parliament, since some of them favour large parties.

Another feature that can affect the broad representation of different groups in parliament is if you can show preference for specific candidates on the ballot. In single-member districts much focus is placed on the individual candidate. The opposite goes for proportional systems, where voters usually cast their vote for a party with several candidates on a list, closed or with some preferential voting. (Massicotte & Blais 2002:65) If the voter has no possibility of showing his or her preference of candidate, there exist no strong incentives for candidates to develop personal profiles. (Shugart 2001:26)

Lijphart advocates closed list voting in PR systems, the reason for this being to “encourage the formation and maintenance of strong and cohesive political parties.” (Lijphart 2004:101) In some societies, however, this can have a negative effect. Depending on the features and roles of parties in societies with specific contingencies, a country with a closed list system could be characterised as a “hyper-centralised system”, a term presented by Matthew Soberg Shugart. In this type of system, the voter has no option of choosing between candidates, and furthermore, the party in question is centralised to a small elite. The decision of who will be a candidate lies in the hands of this small elite, and therefore there is a risk that the candidates care only about the interests of the top leaders, and thus ignore the interests of the voters. (Shugart 2001:35-36)

### 2.3.3 Plurality/Majority Systems

#### *Description*

There exist two kinds of majoritarian electoral systems; plurality and majority. When Bolivia introduced a majoritarian component to their electoral system, a plurality (first-pass-the-post) variant was chosen. Thus I will focus on this kind, leaving behind the majority system (Massicotte & Blais 1999:354) The characteristic of the plurality (first-pass-the-post) system is foremost that candidates are elected in single-member districts (SMD's).<sup>1</sup> This is a simple way of choosing a candidate: Only one candidate from each party or faction competes in every district, and the candidate winning the most votes (being over 50 per cent or not) is elected. (Massicotte & Blais 2002:42)

#### *Consequences*

As mentioned above, according to Duverger and many with him, plurality systems tend to lead to two-party systems with two candidates challenging each other within each district. Since the winner candidate is the only candidate who gets a seat in parliament, the votes for losing candidates are “wasted”. It is therefore argued that the incentives to form new parties are smaller in plurality systems than in proportional systems, since it is much more difficult for smaller parties to win seats. (Massicotte & Blais 2002:56-57)

However, as stated above, scholars have found that electoral systems can show various patterns depending on a country's geographical, ethnical and social composition. According to Norris (2004:82) and Van Cott (2005:29) single-member districts can be favourable for minor parties in societies where ethnical groups are concentrated geographically. A finding by Gary W. Cox could be an effect of this. His research shows that it is not only the electoral system that influences the number of parties in parliament: ...”the effective number of parties depends on an interaction between electoral and social structure.” This indicates that countries with deep cleavages in society tend towards multipartism in a higher extent than countries with few cleavages. (Cox 1997:221)

Single-member districts are also said to enable a closer relationship between politicians and voters. The reason for this is that the districts are smaller in size, and a representative is solely responsible for his or her district. (Massicotte and Blais 2002:63) This tends to lead to strong candidates since the candidates can benefit from developing a personal profile among the voters in their constituency. (Shugart 2001:26)

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<sup>1</sup> There are exceptions, but as the Bolivian system has SMD's I will not develop this further.

### 2.3.4 Mixed-Member Systems

#### *Description*

“In the prototype of a mixed-member system, half of the seats in a legislative chamber are elected in single-seat districts while the other half are elected from party lists allocated by proportional representation (PR).” (Shugart & Wattenberg 2001:9) Bolivia comes fairly close to this prototype, as 48 per cent are elected from multimember districts and thus 52 per cent by single-member districts. (Shugart & Wattenberg 2001: 9, 20) There are vast opportunities of designing the mixed system in different manners to achieve different effects. There are different ways of emphasising the plurality or proportionality part. One way has already been mentioned here: By elaborating with the percentage of seats allocated by the single- or multi-member districts.

#### *Consequences*

“*Mixed electoral systems have attracted minimal systematic attention from scholars.*” This is a quote from Louis Massicotte and André Blais, (1999: 341) in the article “Mixed Electoral Systems: a Conceptual and Empirical Survey” published nine years ago. They proceed by saying that this matter of fact is bound to change, since the number of countries using the mixed system has risen considerably with the spread of democratization in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As we have seen above, both PR and majoritarian systems are said to have advantages as well as flaws, and the attractiveness of the mixed-member systems lies in the possibility of taking the best parts of both systems and join them into one, potentially even better, mixed system. (Shugart & Wattenberg 2001: 2) The idea is that the mixed system should both provide possibilities for strong governance and fair representation. According to Shugart (2001:26), the hopes are that the candidates running in SMD’s create ties between voters and politicians, while the level of party cohesion can remain high through the list vote. This is also suggested by Nohlen (1996:54), who advocates the introduction of personalised voting in societies with proportional representation where a weak relationship exists between voters and politicians.

## 2.4 Alternative Approaches

As pointed out above, the objective of this thesis is not to establish that the institutional reforms were the sole reason why MAS could emerge at the electoral arena in Bolivia. I do not believe that this is the case. Many other factors led to the outcome we have seen in the last few years. The events could have been studied from a diverge range of perspectives, for example looking at social or economic explanations, or applying an actor-centric perspective in the study of Evo Morales as an actor. My choice has been to focus on *one* of the aspects that could have led to the events that followed. Due to the limitations in time and page numbers of

this thesis, if I were to look at all of them, they would not have been able to get the in-depth treatment I aspire to achieve. However, I shall here give you some notions of other perspectives that could have been applied.

In her article “From Exclusion to Inclusion: Bolivia’s 2002 Elections” (2003:751-753), Donna Lee Van Cott applies a *social movement theory framework* to explain the first big electoral success for MAS. No indigenous party had previously won more than 4.6 per cent of the vote in national elections, but this time MAS gained 20.94 per cent. Van Cott lists five interacting factors explaining this success, one of them being the institutional changes that I will develop further on. Her other factors are: “...the collapse of two competitive parties; the consolidation of indigenous peoples’ social movement organisations; the unpopularity of the Banzer-Quiroga government and the intense anti-government mobilisations it provoked in 2000; and the ability of the indigenous parties to capitalise on growing nationalist, anti-US public sentiment.” (Van Cott 2003:751) She thus points to structural features, such as the institutional changes, as well as to more direct events, such as protests against an unpopular government, to explain the events that followed.

## 3 Method

The method through which the question of this thesis will be investigated I choose to call a *comparative (before-after) case study over time*. The method has connections to the institutional theory being used, presented in the previous chapter.

### 3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Viewpoint

The perceived advantages and setbacks of a specific study could depend on what kind of ontological and epistemological viewpoint you take on science. Some scientists might argue that there exists a contradiction between complex, detailed case studies and generalised statistical methods. If your epistemological standpoint is that generalised knowledge is impossible, methods trying to establish theories on the causation of a phenomenon drawing on information from a large amount of cases would probably not be of interest. Many social scientists do, however, find comparisons between cases very interesting. And while few social scientists today believe in the possibilities of creating scientific laws, they strive to establish theories derived from as many cases as possible. It is becoming more and more common among political science scholars to acknowledge that detailed studies of a single phenomenon and more large-n studies both have important roles to play in political science. While any broader generalisations can never be drawn from a study of a single country, it can provide us with an understanding of complex, interacting factors that are very difficult to capture in statistical comparisons of a large number of countries. (George & Bennett 2005:2-6, Lundquist 1993:40-42, 67)

My ambition is not to make a final standpoint on these matters. I do, however, have a personal liking of conducting more complex, in-depth studies, which is what you will see here. But my using of theories from previous cases and efforts to look at some causal chains implies that I acknowledge the possibility of making generalisations.

As pointed out in the theory section, however, the historical institutionalism perspective emphasises the historical contingency of each case. As you have seen in the theory section, hypotheses on how an electoral system will function in practice can be dependent on the specific geographic, social and ethnic composition of a country. Thus, the specific historical background of Bolivia will be taken into account in the following analysis.

## 3.2 The Comparative Case Study

My investigation will be a type of qualitative case study, where only one country, Bolivia, will be investigated. However, it will also contain a comparative element, since I will look at Bolivia before and after the electoral reform. Alexander George and Andrew Bennett describe the case study approach as “the detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events.” (George & Bennett 2005:5) This description captures quite well the essence of the method I intend to use here.

Both Harry Eckstein and Arend Lijphart have developed typologies of case studies with similar contents, although they do not use the same terminology. My study could be seen as a kind of *interpretative case study* (Lijphart) or *disciplined-configurative study* (Eckstein). I will here use the terminology of Eckstein. By disciplined-configurative implies that the case study is not merely descriptive (atheoretical). It uses established theories to explain a case and is thus theory consuming. (George & Bennett 2005:213) As I discussed in the theory section, however, this essay cannot merely be a theory consuming one. The study of mixed-member systems in new democracies is fairly new, and scholars disagree on certain issues. The theories therefore need further development. It is pointed out by Eckstein (1992, p.139) that a disciplined-configurative study also can be theory testing, if you find that there are shortcomings in a theory since a case cannot be explained adequately.

One of the strengths of the case study is that it enables a rich, in-depth description of a phenomenon. (Lundquist 1993:104-105) This concurs with the ambition of the historical institutionalism perspective to regard political events as complex where many interacting factors are to be taken into account.

In both the theoretical perspective I use here and in the methodology, the virtues of process tracing are being emphasised. In process tracing, the many different steps that lead to a specific outcome are studied and documented, to better being able to conclude whether the events were dependent upon each other. (George & Bennett 2005:6) Process tracing usually refers to an actor-centric perspective where the researcher tries to identify actions made by decision-makers, with the purpose of investigating the chain of small decisions that led to a specific outcome. This method, however, has also been used in the study of institutional design. (Esaïsson et al., 2004, pp.142-144)

In an ideal situation, process tracing aims to document every step of an event, so as to be able to say with certainty how a specific causal chain developed. The range of this essay makes this an impossible task. However, the intention will be to look at the events of the Bolivian elections over time, trying to map at least one plausible chain of events that enhance our understanding of the electoral system change as a process. (George & Bennett 2005:206-207) This will be helped by the fact that I introduce a before-after comparative element to my study, where I make a within-case comparison of the different Bolivian electoral systems.

The comparative method has a long history in the social sciences. 19<sup>th</sup> century writer John Stuart Mill, in his efforts to develop a method that would prove causation, presented the *Method of Difference* and *Method of Agreement*. These methods set out to identify similarities and differences between phenomena or cases of various kinds. (Peters 1998:28-29) They have been developed during the course of the years into the *Most Similar Design (MSD)* and *Most Different Design (MDD)*. My thesis will use some of the logic of the Most Similar Design, although applied to one single country, with the comparison regarding different moments in the Bolivian contemporary history.

Looking at one specific country (case) with the logic of the Most Similar Design is quite thankful. When you use the Most Similar Design you strive to find two or more countries with very similar features, so as to be able establish that the factor you look at is the one explaining the differing outcome. Instead, you can use this method ...”by dividing a single longitudinal case into two sub-cases” (George & Bennett 2005:166) George and Bennett call this design method the “before-after research design”. In dividing Bolivia into two sub-cases - before and after the institutional reform - I can look closer upon the differences of the possibilities of the MAS to enter national politics.

However, one of the problems with this approach is that, since I study only the institutional factor, I cannot rule out that other changes in Bolivian society occurred at the same time. Thus, I have to repeat what I have already mentioned; since the scope of this essay does not allow me to study more than one factor, my intention cannot be to try to say something about whether the electoral system change was the only factor of importance for the emergence of MAS. The advantage of this study will thus rather be the possibility of an in-depth study of the electoral system change factor.

### 3.3 Material

This essay is mostly based on secondary material such as books and articles by scholars that write on the subject in question. Also, statistics from elections in Bolivia and some other statistical information will be used.

In my research process, my starting point has been to search for material departing from the works of well-known political scientists, related to research fields such as institutionalism and electoral systems design. Among these are Arend Lijphart, Pippa Norris, Matthew Soberg Shugart and Martin P. Wattenberg. I have also turned to more Bolivia-specific researchers such as René Antonio Mayorga and Donna Lee Van Cott. Mayorga is the author of the chapters on Bolivia in Shugart and Wattenberg’s *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems. The Best of Both Worlds?* (2001) as well as several articles analysing recent political events in Bolivia. Donna Lee Van Cott has written extensively on indigenous movements

in Latin America and has written the chapter on Bolivia in Freedom House's *Countries at the Crossroads 2007*. (Van Cott, Curriculum Vitae)

Thus, the works cited in this essay come from well-renowned scholars published by journals and book publishers connected to universities and other forums related to the scientific field in question. I hope that this will guarantee that the accuracy of information is as high as possible and that theories and empirical material is of relevance to the political science contemporary world.

## 4 The Bolivian Case

I have already given you some background information on Bolivian society and its electoral system. Here I will give you some more details on phenomena that matter to the following analysis.

Bolivia is by many regarded as an electoral democracy, which holds generally free and fair elections. However, problems with social, regional and ethnic polarisation, some practical restrictions to the freedom of the press etc., leaves the country many difficult issues to tamper with. It is rated “partly free” by Freedom House, scoring a three both on political rights and civil liberties. (Freedom House Homepage)

Between 1978 and 1982, various attempts to hold elections took place, as well as several military coups. From 1982 and onwards, Bolivia has held elections with regularity. (Gamarra & Malloy 1995:409) Pre-reform elections were held in 1985, 1989 and 1993, and post-reform elections in 1997, 2002 and 2005. (Mayorga 2001a:195-196, Van Cott 2003, Singer 2007)

The Bolivian two-chamber system consists of a 130-seat Chamber of Deputies and a Senate with 27 members. The Bolivian senate was not affected by the reforms of 1994, and is therefore not dealt with here. Senates are elected by a closed-list formula from three-seat districts. The largest party in each department wins two seats while the runner-up wins one. (Mayorga 2001a:195)

Bolivian politics was during the 20<sup>th</sup> century dominated by the MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionaria). As mentioned in the introduction, they led the revolution of 1952 and were in power until the first military coup of 1964. (Gamarra & Malloy 1995:402-405) The Chamber of Deputies has traditionally been dominated by three or four major parties. Among the biggest have been the MNR, Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN), Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR) and Conciencia de Patria (CONDEPA). These parties have traditionally been run by an elite of European descent. (Mayorga 2001a:195-196, Freedom House Homepage)

Bolivia is a country with severe social, ethnic and geographic cleavages. The cleavages of Bolivia go hand in hand and can be characterised as follows: In the eastern parts live people of European descent who have most of the economic resources. Subsequently, on the western highlands we find large parts of the indigenous populations, who are more exposed to poverty and have been excluded from national politics for a long time. Obviously, these are generalisations and overall trends, not rigid categories that apply to everyone.

Approximately 62 per cent of the Bolivian population is of indigenous heritage. Establishing exact numbers might not be very important for this essay. Worth noting, however, is that the indigenous peoples consist of more than half of the population. Subsequently, the indigenous population cannot be regarded as an

ethnic minority. As a matter of fact, Bolivia is the country in Latin America with the highest percentage of indigenous population. (Van Cott 2005:50)

The class concept has existed in Bolivian politics for quite some time. But it was not until the late 1990's that an ethno-cultural dimension was added to the question of class in the national elections. (Mayorga 2003:100) Small indigenous parties have tried to make their way into the national elections of Bolivia before, but they have never reached more than 2.7 per cent. (Van Cott 2003:753)

According to Van Cott, a municipal decentralisation of 1995 was of importance for the emergence of parties with an indigenous base, in the sense that incentives to start a party were larger. In the decentralisation, 311 municipalities were created, and many of these had indigenous populations. The possibility of participating in local elections thus emerged. In 1995, a decision to form a party called the Asamblea de la Soberanía de los Pueblos (ASP) was taken by a meeting with delegates from indigenous groups. Elections were held in 1995 and candidates identifying themselves as indigenous won a majority in 73 of the 311 municipalities.

The indigenous parties that formed in the 1990's have their roots in peasant movements and labour organisations, such as the Unitary Syndical Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB). Mapping the evolution of the indigenous parties is somewhat complicated by the fact that they often have been running on the slates of other parties, or formed alliances with existing parties, as to get access to the political system. The first indigenous party to form was the ASP, who used the name of Izquierda Unida (IU) in municipal and national elections from 1995 to 1999. Later, the ASP split into two different parties, resulting in the splinter Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos (IPSP). The IPSP later became the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), since it used the registration of MAS in the 1999 municipal elections. Further down, when relevant I will be referring to ASP-IU as one party and IPSP-MAS as one. Future president Evo Morales was active in both of these parties. (Van Cott 2005:55, 69, 86-87)

# 5 Analysis: Theory Testing and Process Tracing

## 5.1 Bolivia's PR System: Why Was There No Broad Representation?

As we have seen in the theory section, proportional systems have been regarded by some as a way of ensuring broad representation in parliament. However, there are also theories pointing to that some potential features of this system that can be of hindrance for the emergence of new parties, or the possibility of small parties to gain votes in elections.

Van Cott suggests that in Bolivian history, political elites have deliberately created rules that refrains indigenous groups from gaining political power, through “high barriers to ballot access and the centralization of the political system”. (Van Cott 2005:24)

There was no percentage threshold included in the old proportional representation system of Bolivia. In an additional reform of 1996 that modified the reform of 1994 slightly, a 3 per cent threshold was added to the electoral system, inhibiting parties with a lower number of votes to enter parliament. (Mayorga 2001b:433) That the indigenously based parties emerged after this threshold was established might point to that the hypothesis of high thresholds is not valid for Bolivia. As you will see below, parties with very small percentages have been able to obtain seats in the Chamber of Deputies. However, the electoral system has had what Van Cott calls “a de facto 3 percent threshold”. In the electoral laws of 1979 were included rules that required parties who did not reach 3 percent of the vote to share the costs of printing their ballots. There has also existed demands of fine-payments and loss of party registration if 3 percent of the votes were not achieved. Trying to form parties has thus depended on whether you have access to economic resources. (Van Cott 2005:63)

In the 1980's, complicated systems with special types of quotas were used to decide whether small parties would receive seats or not. At this time, the National Electoral Court (CNE) was not an independent institution; it was dominated by the large parties. This created possibilities of electoral fraud. Furthermore, an “exception clause” from 1989 allowed the CNE to decide on whether small parties would receive a seat in parliament. Elections thus gave large parties the opportunity to influence the composition of seats in parliament, and the possibility for small parties to obtain seats in the Chamber of Deputies has varied. In 1989 no

small parties gained seats, but in 1985 and in 1993 parties with less than two percent could do so. (Mayorga 2001a:195-197)

The multimember districts were (and are) divided according to administrative divisions, and district magnitude varied between districts, with the average being 14 (pre-reform data), a fairly high number. Accordingly, seat allocation formulas and district magnitude were not of any major importance regarding whether indigenous parties could enter politics or not. (Mayorga 2001a:195, Morgenstern & Vázquez-D'Elía 2007:150)

Bolivia's pre-reform proportional system could indeed be classified as a hyper-centralised system, where the closed candidate lists were entirely in the hands of the centralised elite, as characterised by Shugart in the theory section. Gamarra and Malloy give us this characterisation: "Bolivia's complex proportional representation system include[d] a so-called lista completa, or single-slate ballot, which not only allowed party bosses to handpick their candidates, but also centralized in La Paz the election of members of Congress." (Gamarra & Malloy 1995:412) This is confirmed by Van Cott (2003:755) who states that the centralised, unitary system of Bolivia made it difficult for local, regional or poorly funded movements to compete in elections.

## 5.2 The Electoral Reform Process

The electoral reform was undertaken in Bolivia in 1994, with some modifications made in 1996. A mixed-member proportional system was introduced, and a 3% threshold was added. Now, 68 of the 130 deputies are elected by plurality rule in single-seat districts, and the remaining 62 are chosen by party-list voting according to proportional representation in nine regional multi-seat districts. (Mayorga 2001a:194)

"An electoral political reform is a deliberate political act." This is a statement from Shugart (2001:27). And indeed, the electoral system reform of Bolivia was a product of the parties in power of that time. What did the reformers expect to achieve with the new mixed system?

It seems like a logical assumption to make, that the intentions of those parties were not to marginalise themselves and make way for MAS (or any other party with indigenous roots) to emerge and eventually gain the presidency. The reform was undertaken as elites became aware of the poor quality of democracy and representation in the country. One of the features, the introduction of the single-member districts, was thought to enhance the contact and trust between politicians and voters through a more personalized representation. (2001a:197) The ADN and MIR actually proposed that Bolivia should switch from the proportional system to a complete plurality system. But this was something that MNR opposed to strongly. The reason that Mayorga gives to this opposition of the MNR is, interestingly, that this would create opportunities for small parties with regional

strongholds to enter the national political stage. Instead, the MNR suggested the mixed-member system that was later elected. (Mayorga 2001a:204)

According to Mayorga, there were three main reasons why the mixed-member system was chosen:

- “By abolishing the closed party lists for more than a half of the Chamber of Deputies, the mixed-member proportional system would help create direct linkages between parties, constituencies, and legislators.”

- “By creating 68 single-seat districts, the reformers thought the mixed-member proportional system could lead to a stronger geographic decentralization and the development of local governments.”

- “The possibility of vote-splitting by giving two votes to voters was considered as an adequate mechanism to enhance the choices of voters in democratic elections.” (Mayorga 2001a:201)

Consequently, there seem to have been a consensus on the fact that the centralised closed list system was giving the country democratic problems, and that the introduction of SMD’s might help to solve this problem. The option of abolishing the proportional lists entirely was discarded, though, as a too high level of geographical representation was unwanted. It seems that the reformers thus could foresee some of the effects that later were shown, but not all of them.

Neither the indigenous movements seemed to have grasped the possible openings to winning votes in elections with the new mixed system. According to Van Cott (2005:69), indigenous movements did not campaign in favour of the reforms. During the reform process they rather expected rights to be taken away from them.

### 5.3 Bolivia’s Mixed-Member System and the Emergence of MAS

Scholars writing on the subject do indeed advocate that the electoral reform created openings for parties with an indigenous profile to emerge at the national political arena. René Antonio Mayorga (2003:101) states that the reforms 1994-96 stimulated a “territorialisation” of the vote. This meant that there were possibilities to vote for regional candidates who shared the same ethnic and cultural origins as the indigenous voters. And with the creation of the SMD’s the ASP-IU saw that there was an opening into national politics, since they could compete in their regional base. (Van Cott 2003:755-756, Van Cott 2005:70-71)

#### *1997 Elections*

The possibilities of the indigenous candidates to benefit from the SMD’s, enabling to create a personal connection with the voters in their geographical base, is very clear when looking at the 1997 elections. At this time, future president Evo

Morales belonged to the ASP-IU, and had already begun to gain popularity: he won some 60 per cent of the votes in his single-member district, more than any other candidate. (Van Cott 2005:86) Morales was not the only candidate to benefit from the SMD system. The ASP-IU won a total of four single-member seats in these elections. According to Mayorga, only the small parties took advantage of the possibility of encouraging candidates with a clear personal profile to run in the SMD's. The strong parties rather tried to avoid this, continuing to try to keep tight central control of their nominations. (Mayorga 2001b:437) Furthermore, a clear regional effect can be seen regarding the ASP-IU. In the indigenously based western highland department of Cochabamba, they gained a whole of 17 per cent of the votes, while the national result was of only 3.7 per cent. (Mayorga 2001b:434-436)

Perhaps this is the election where the effect of the new electoral system is the highest, which seems plausible since it was at this time the possible success of the newly formed indigenous parties was being put to the test. However, some tendencies remained in subsequent elections.

#### *2002 Elections*

It was in the 2002 elections that the MAS made its leap toward becoming a political force of importance in Bolivia. They went from having gained 3.7 per cent in the 1997 elections to receive 22 per cent of the votes in the Chamber of Deputies in 2002. This time, the votes were distributed evenly between single- and multimember districts. (CNE Homepage)

The regional effect of the 1997 elections continued in 2002. In the western regions of La Paz, Cochabamba, Oruro and Potosí MAS finished first, with votes ranging between 22 and 37 per cent. In the eastern province of Santa Cruz, however, they finished only fourth, receiving 10 per cent of the votes. (Centellas 2005:25, Van Cott 2005:90)

#### *2005 Elections*

In the 2005 elections, when MAS won the majority of the votes (55.4 per cent) and Evo Morales gained presidency, MAS once again gained more seats from the SMD's than the multimember districts. MAS gained 45 of 68 single-member seats, which is about 66 per cent, while only 27 of 62 multi-member seats, which is about 43 per cent. (Singer 2007:204) In these elections, the vote percentage of MAS obviously rose considerably in the whole country, since they managed to gain over half of the votes of the entire population. However, the regional concentration still maintained, with MAS winning over 60 per cent of the votes in Cochabamba and "only" 33 per cent in Santa Cruz. (Romero Ballivián 2006:93)

# 6 Conclusion

## 6.1 Results

*Can electoral system change contribute to the explanation of the rise of the party Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia?* As you surely know by now, this was the question I posed at the beginning of this essay. I did not only investigate the emergence of MAS, but also how it could be that Bolivia did not have any parties representing the indigenous groups in parliament with the previous PR system, and if the possible emergence of an indigenous party was foreseen by the electoral system reformers. I have tried to compare different theories on electoral system with Bolivia and surely made some interesting insights.

According to my findings, the case of Bolivia supports theories that predict that countries with hyper-centralised closed list proportional systems will not provide the broad representation effect that proportional systems are said to do.

They also support theories on the connection between single-member districts, personalised candidacies and regionally divided electorates. The case of Bolivia gives support to the assumptions that small, regionally concentrated parties can benefit from an electoral system including single-member districts, since these parties can put forward candidates who can win in their home district and thus get a seat in the national parliament.

An issue that has not been touched until now here is whether these effects are of a positive or negative nature. Previously, the ethnical divisions of the country were not made visible through the party composition in parliament. The entrance of MAS has thus placed matters concerning regional, ethnical and also social issues on the political agenda in a manner that have not been seen before. Keeping in mind Dahl's idea of an inclusive citizenship for all, this surely seems like a desirable outcome. At the same time, let us not hope that the polarisation between different groups will become so huge that issues cannot be solved by peaceful means.

## 6.2 Further Research

As mentioned several times in this essay, the research on the effects of mixed-member systems has only begun. Many of the countries who have switched to this system recently have only held a limited number of elections so far. It still remains to see if the mixed-member systems can join together the respective virtues of the proportional representation and majoritarian systems.

A topic that would be fascinating to further look into is the process of the electoral system change and the reasons why the mixed-member system was chosen. I have touched upon this briefly here, but a much more in-depth study identifying the different actors involved in the process, the goals they aimed to achieve and the trade-offs that were made would surely be interesting to conduct.

What has really caught my eye through this research process is how it seems that the features of the electoral system can impact the possibilities of different groups in society if they are concentrated geographically. Will the Bolivian mixed-member system come to state an example to other excluded groups, in other countries, of the possibilities to gain access to seats in parliaments? And what will become of the case of Bolivia? Will the regional cleavages become so strong that the country might come to see a civil war in the future? Or will national unity be achieved? Since we live in a world where regional, national and global borders are being blurred and intertwined in different fashions, the future of the Bolivian state will surely be interesting to follow.

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