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Eight Candidates Register for December's Election

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The deadline for registering candidates for this December's presidential election in Bolivia passed with eight contenders having entered the race. The Corte Nacional Electoral (CNE) closed registration on Sept. 5. A flurry of party desertions led known political figures to new groups for regional offices, even as the lowest number of parties for a presidential election in recent decades entered the contests. The elections, convoked in July by transitional President Eduardo Rodriguez, will name a new chief executive for the country, which still faces extreme conflicts regarding distribution of the country's large natural-gas resources.

Quiroga, Morales lead field of eight

Two big names lead polls for the Dec. 4 election: former President Jorge Quiroga Ramirez (2001-2002) of the Poder Democratico Social (Podemos) and Congress member Evo Morales of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS). Morales is a leader of coca-growing campesinos who surprised Bolivia-watchers in the last presidential election by coming in second in the national ballot. The two are the favored leaders at this point, with clashes between their supporters outside the CNE marking the final day of registrations.

Businessman Samuel Doria Medina is running under the banner of Unidad Nacional (UN), while retired Rear Adm. Gildo Angulo was presented by the Nueva Fuerza Republicana (NFR). Campesino leader Felipe Quispe of the Movimiento Indigena Pachakuti (MIP) also registered, while the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) of ex-President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (2002-2003) put forth Michiaki Nagatani, a Bolivian of Japanese descent.

Two other candidates, unknown prior to the close of registration, put their hats into the ring: Nestor Garcia of the Union Social de los Trabajadores de Bolivia (USTB) and Eliseo Rodriguez from the Frente Patriotico Agropecuario de Bolivia (FREPAB).

On the day of registration, intermittent clashes took place between Quiroga and Morales supporters. Police made no arrests and the conflicts only ended after all eight groups had finished registering their campaigns in the electoral rolls. Quiroga left the CNE building protected by his supporters amid insults from his opponents. He said he did not fear "intimidation and threats" from MAS followers. "I deeply regret that in this, which should be a democratic festival, MAS continues with the customs of clubs, radicalism, and imposition that it has subjected us to in recent times," said Quiroga.

MAS Deputy Antonio Peredo, registering his party on the CNE lists, replied that his followers "obviously would not let it pass" if they were recipients of hostilities from the other group. The electoral calendar establishes that parties and political groups may replace their candidates until
Oct. 20 if one of them removes his or her name from a race for the executive or legislative branch or for one of the prefectural races.

In a change from previous general elections when parties constituted all the organizations running candidates, there is a proliferation of "citizen groupings" that are presenting candidates for the country's prefectures, or departmental heads. The CNE hoped that the total number of registered voters in the country would rise to 3.6 million with the addition of 400,000 new voters by the Sept. 5 deadline.

**Senate head Hormando Vaca Diez drops candidacy**

Local press said the registration event at the CNE was "like a carnival" of desertions and claimed it would be the first presidential election with unexpected "sudden ties" between previously opposed figures. The most surprising change came from the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), with their presidential candidate quitting and accusing his party chief of disrupting his campaign. At the last minute, former Congress head Hormando Vaca Diez withdrew his name from the race, accusing his boss, ex-President Jaime Paz Zamora (1989-1993), of sabotaging his candidacy in favor of Quiroga.

Paz Zamora has entered the race to be prefect for the southern department of Tarija, where he enjoys broad support. He got into the race not under the MIR banner but with a citizen group that, according to the press, brings him closer to Quiroga.

Another MIR militant, Guido Anez, former president of the Chamber of Deputies, is running for prefect of the eastern department of Santa Cruz on the slate of Quiroga's Podemos party.

MIR Deputy and ex-ambassador to Cuba Elsa Guevara joined Doria Medina's UN to run for the legislature, as did former soccer captain of the national squad Carlos Borja. Residents of his neighborhood in La Paz opposed the move strongly and burned his photograph at the doors of the CNE.

Jose Luis Paredes, an ex-MIR member and current mayor of El Alto (the neighboring city to La Paz), joined Quiroga's party and accepted the candidacy to be prefect of La Paz, even when hours before he had told the press he would prefer to stay on the election sidelines and would not stand for any office. By the end of the registration period, Vaca Diez found himself abandoned by some of the top leaders of his party and its militants.

This year Vaca Diez has been the Tantalus of the Bolivian presidency, close enough to smell power, but never able to reach out and hold it. After the resignation of former President Carlos Mesa in June, the presidency reverted automatically to Vaca Diez, but fierce negotiations with opposition groups and the likelihood that there would be mass resistance leading to bloodshed forced the Senate president to renounce the office. The president of the lower house of Congress, Mario Cossio, made the same choice, giving power to Rodriguez, head of the Corte Suprema de Justicia (CSJ) and a much less polarizing figure, for the transitional presidency (see NotiSur, 2005-06-17).
Many other candidates switched party affiliations, leading the local press to give this year's race the title "the elections of the opportunists." Nonetheless, even in the festival of changing loyalties, the presidential ballot will feature the fewest political parties registered in the past 20 years. In the 1985 balloting, 18 parties participated; in 1989, 10 registered; in 1993, 14 party candidates campaigned; in 1997, 10 registered; and in 2002, there were 11 party candidates. The eight candidates of this year's vote makes for a relatively clear field, even though none seems likely to get the 50% plus one majority necessary for an automatic win.

A survey by Apoyo Opinion y Mercado gave Quiroga the top spot in the race, with 22% of respondents saying they would vote for him. Quiroga, known by the nickname Tuto, says he hopes to create "a true revolution in democracy," to have a "Bolivia with security and stability," with "order and unity," and to eradicate social discrimination. Quiroga's call for order is clearly an attack on Morales, who has frequently led opposition protests to the governments of Mesa and Sanchez de Lozada, regularly paralyzing the nation's highways and cities. Morales is a close second in the surveys, with some showing him only one point behind Quiroga. Millionaire businessman Doria Medina comes in third, though polls in early August showed him leading Morales by a slight margin.

Many polls, like many opinion surveys in the Andean region, look at sample groups from the cities without taking rural voters into account. The MAS expects that it will have solid backing in rural areas and is trying to reach out to middle-class voters who traditionally oppose the indigenous-campesino movement that advocates for coca growers.

With little possibility of a clear winner and Bolivian electoral law not providing for runoff elections, the determination of who will be president will likely again fall into the hands of Congress. There, deal-making and alliances would hold sway, as they did in the process that named Sanchez de Lozada in 2002 (see NotiSur, 2002-07-05). That time, Bolivia's extreme poverty and unemployment made the electoral process a delicate one.

Now, with many sectors of the country regularly engaged in radical protest, the vote could be even more delicate. Quiroga has proposed either a popular referendum requiring a 50% approval after the Congress makes its pick or giving victory to the winner of the top number of votes.

**Felipe Quispe attacks Evo's left flank**

Victory prospects for Morales' MAS appear mixed, with MAS breaking ranks with other leftist parties. La Federacion de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto (FEJUVE) broke with MAS after it could not enter any of its candidates for prefect under the MAS banner. MAS leaders have expressed confidence that rural voters will overwhelmingly support Morales at the ballot box, along with members of the urban working class.

Some members of Bolivia's grassroots protest movements have, however, expressed disillusionment with Morales' term in the Congress, saying he has paid more attention to maintaining electoral power than to indigenous campesino political demands. The most prominent example of this came during the protests that ultimately led to the removal of President Mesa.
Indigenous political movements were calling for the complete nationalization of Bolivia's vast hydrocarbons resources while Morales took a more moderate line, saying that the scheme the Congress had passed, an 18% royalty and a new 32% tax on hydrocarbon extractions, should be made a 50% royalty (see NotiSur, 2005-05-27, 2005-06-17). The royalty would go directly to provincial governments, while a tax would go through the widely mistrusted central government.

Morales eventually rejoined the nationalization camp, but his reticence led more radical leaders to denounce him. Among those leaders was Felipe Quispe, whose Aymara identity distinguishes him from MAS, perceived as a mostly Quechua organization. Quispe has engaged in verbal war with Morales at an increasing pitch since it became evident that their joint protests were bringing down former president Mesa.

Election unlikely to resolve structural problems

Election watchers are now looking to see whom the candidates will name as their vice-presidential candidates. In the past five years, two vice presidents have taken over after the president stepped down: Mesa following the ouster of Sanchez de Lozada and Quiroga, who took over for ex-President Hugo Banzer (1971-1978, 1997-2001) who resigned because of illness.

Quiroga has named Bolivian journalist Maria Rene Duchen as his running mate. Until Sept. 2, she was national coordinator for the ATB television network, owned by the Spanish group Prisa. Quiroga says she would be the first woman in 180 years of Bolivian republican history to stand for one of the country's top executive offices. Aymara leader Quispe, who in previous years has led staunch blockades in the Bolivian highlands, presented Camila Choquetijilla, also indigenous and of the MIP. Morales has joined with Alvaro Garcia Linera of the now-defunct Ejercito Guerrilero Tupac Katari (EGTK) who spent five years in jail in the 1990s.

Doria Medina of the UN is running with medical doctor Carlos Dabdoub, a promoter of the eastern departments' autonomist movement, which opponents accuse of being secessionist (see NotiSur, 2004-11-12). Michiaki Nagatani brought lawyer and economist Guillermo Bedregal onto his ticket. Analysts say Bedregal represents the "old guard" of Sanchez de Lozada's MNR party. Three other candidates are still determining their running mates. But Bolivia watchers tend to agree that presidential elections will not solve the structural inequities that have made political and economic life there so volatile.

Massive poverty persists, compounded by petroleum corporations' unease with operating in such a climate. Sociologist and political analyst Anibal Aguilar says, "In structural terms, the elections do not resolve the fundamental problems of the country because the dispersion of political forces will be characteristic, and, above all, because about 70% of the population has an unfavorable opinion [of all candidates] and almost all are inclined to cast blank or null ballots."

Aguilar says that the citizenry does not see serious, consistent programmatic proposals from the parties that have registered. "All the traditional parties are considered by the population as more of the same; that is seen in all the surveys of La Paz, El Alto, and other cities," says Aguilar, adding that...
the unfavorable opinion held toward traditional party candidates demonstrates "that the citizenry does not feel that it is represented."

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