

Bolivia

The Plurinational State of Bolivia



Key Facts



OAS Membership Date: 30 April 1948

Head of State / Head of Government:
President Juan Evo Morales Ayma

Capital city: La Paz

Population: 11,306,341

Language(s): Spanish (official) (60.7%), Quechua (official) (21.2%), Aymara (official) (14.6%), foreign languages (2.4%), Guarani (official) (0.6%), other native languages (0.4%), none (0.1%)

Religions: Roman Catholic (76.8%), Evangelical and Pentecostal (8.1%), Protestant (7.9%), other (1.7%), none (0.1%)

Ethnic Groups: Mestizo (mixed white and Amerindian ancestry (68%), indigenous (20%), white (5%), cholo/chola (5%), black (1%), other (1%), unspecified (3%) [44% feel part of some indigenous group]

Currency: Bolivian boliviano (Bs)

Gross domestic product (PPP): \$83.72 billion (2017 est.)

Legal System: civil law system influenced by Spanish, Roman, canon (religious), French, and indigenous law

Political system: The president of Bolivia, who is both the chief of state and head of government, is directly elected on the same ballot with the vice president in one of three ways: the candidate wins 50% of the vote, or at least 40% of the vote and 10% more than the next highest candidate; otherwise a second round is held and the winner determined by simple majority vote. There are no term limits (this was changed from two-consecutive-term limit by the Constitutional Court in late 2017). The legislative branch of Bolivia's government, officially titled the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, consists of a Chamber of Senators (upper house) and a Chamber of Deputies (lower house). The 36 Senate seats are directly elected by proportional representation vote. Senators serve five-year terms. The Chamber of Deputies consists of 130 seats. 70 seats are directly elected in single-seat constituencies by simple majority vote, 53 seats are directly elected in single-seat constituencies by proportional representation vote, and 7 seats are apportioned to non-contiguous rural areas in 7 of the 9 states. Deputies serve five-year terms. The judicial branch of Bolivia consists of five high courts: the Supreme Court, which numbers 12 justices and is organized into civil, penal, social, and administrative chambers; the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal, which consists of 7 primary and 7 alternate magistrates; the Plurinational Electoral Organ, which consists of 7 members and 6 alternates; National Agro-Environment Court, which consist of 5 primary and 5 alternate judges; and the Council of the Judiciary, which consists of three primary and three alternate judges. The Supreme Court, Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal, National Agro-Environmental Court, and Council of the Judiciary candidates are pre-selected by the Plurinational Legislative Assembly and elected by direct popular vote for six-year terms. The Plurinational Electoral Organ judges are appointed (6 by the Legislative Assembly and 1 by the President), and serve for six-year terms.

Economy: Bolivia is a resource-rich country with strong growth attributed to high demand for natural gas exports, most notably to Brazil and Argentina. However, Bolivia is still one of the most underdeveloped countries in South America due to state-oriented policies that deter investment. Bolivia had previously suffered an economic crisis in the 1980s, but private investment in the 1990s spurred economic growth and cut poverty rates. The period between 2003-2005 was marked by political instability, racial tensions, and protests over the discovery of natural gas resources and a plan to export them to larger Northern Hemisphere markets. In 2005-2006, the government implemented hydrocarbon laws that imposed higher royalties and forced foreign firms to surrender all production to the state energy company in exchange for a predetermined service fee, sparking much debate. In early 2016, in an effort to spur private investment, the government implemented the 2016-2020 National Economic and Social Development Plan, which aimed at sustaining economic growth at 5% and reducing poverty.

Diplomatic Relations

Relations with the OAS: Although it was a founding member of the Organization of American States, Bolivia has recently come under fire from the bloc for a controversial 2014 election. The OAS sent a mission to Bolivia to ensure democratic elections were free and fair, a step the Bolivian government disagreed with. Another incident between Bolivia and the OAS occurred in 1979, when the OAS passed the *426 Resolution*. Bolivia had laid claim to a maritime coast that was currently under Chilean sovereignty. The OAS-sponsored resolution declared that the problem at hand was a hemispheric issue, and that the OAS did not have jurisdiction over the matter. Currently, the OAS is worried that Bolivian President Morales is using elections as a façade of democracy and that in reality he is tending towards authoritarianism. Morales has since blamed the United States for using the OAS as a “repressive stick” aimed at Bolivia. However, Bolivia has taken hard stances against democratic countries, specifically the United States and the rest of the free world, in refusing to condemn attacks on civilians, specifically the Syrian Army's use of chemical weapons on its own civilians.

Relations with Venezuela: Bolivia remains one of the few defenders of Venezuela's President Maduro in the face of international pressure in response to the crisis. Bolivia has an embassy in Caracas, and Venezuela possesses an embassy in La Paz. Bolivia has refused to side with other Latin and South American countries in condemning the Maduro regime, and currently is the only South American country to do so. Bolivia has offered Maduro unconditional support, and claimed that in doing so is to defend "Latin American sovereignty." Bolivia also remains close allies with Cuba, another state that has supported the Maduro regime. In fact, Bolivian President Morales' first overseas trip as president was to Cuba. Venezuela in turn also supports all of Bolivia's claims of maritime ownership. In international forums, Bolivia frequently votes in favor of Venezuela, and has implemented the practice of "noisy diplomacy" modeled by those opposed to the United States and its allies.