

What Drives Evo's Attempts to Remain in Power?

A Psychological Explanation

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Abstract

The current Bolivian President, Evo Morales, has managed to govern longer than all of his predecessors thanks to his three successful attempts to relax his term limits. In this article, I argue that the high risk-taking personality of Morales, especially his social risk-taking, helps to explain why he has consistently tried to extend his time in the presidency. To address this proposition I follow a twofold strategy. First, I show the results of a survey conducted among experts in presidents of the Americas. This survey measured different personality traits of the leaders that governed between 1945 and 2012, including their risk-taking. Second, I examine some of the most important decisions that Morales has made throughout his adult life. Both the survey and the analysis of Morales' trajectory suggest that his attempts to cling to power are rooted in a risk-taking dynamics.

Keywords

constitution, Evo Morales, nationalizations, risk-taking, term limits

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Resumen

El actual presidente boliviano, Evo Morales, ha logrado gobernar más que todos sus predecesores gracias a sus tres intentos exitosos de extender los límites de su mandato. En este artículo argumento que la personalidad de alta propensión al riesgo de Morales, especialmente su propensión a los riesgos sociales, ayuda a entender por qué ha tratado consistentemente de extender su mandato presidencial. Para examinar esta propuesta sigo una estrategia doble. Primero, muestro los resultados de una encuesta realizada a expertos en presidentes latinoamericanos. Esta encuesta midió diferentes rasgos de personalidad de los líderes que gobernaron entre 1945 y 2012, incluyendo su propensión al riesgo. Segundo, examino algunas de las decisiones más importantes que Morales ha tomado a lo largo de su vida adulta. Tanto la encuesta como el análisis de la trayectoria de Morales sugieren que sus intentos por conservar el poder están arraigados en su propensión al riesgo.

Palabras claves

constitución, Evo Morales, límite de mandatos, nacionalizaciones, propensión al riesgo

Introduction

When Bolivian President Evo Morales took office on January 22 of 2006, he was ineligible to run for a second consecutive term under the 1967 Constitution. He had to step down in 2010. But that was not part of his plan. In his first year in power, he convoked a constituent assembly to replace the existing constitution, which finally occurred in January 2009. The new constitution, crafted by pro-governmental forces and under the close scrutiny of Morales, increased the presidential term from four to five years and allowed immediate reelection. On December 2009, general elections were held under the new charter. Morales was reelected and was able to govern until 2014. However, that was not enough for him, and he used his influence on the judiciary to remain in power. Eventually, it paid off. In April 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that Morales' first term (2006-2009) did not count towards the constitutional term limits because he was elected under the previous charter, and therefore under a different set of rules. That decision allowed Morales to run for the 2014 presidential election, and in winning, he gained the right to govern until 2020. In October 2015, Morales surpassed Andrés de Santa Cruz (1829-1839) as the longest serving president in Bolivia's history. But Morales was not satisfied. In February 2016, he convoked a referendum to be allowed

to be reelected for a fourth term, potentially extending his administration until 2025. This time, however, he narrowly lost (by 51% to 49%). Nevertheless, this defeat seems unlikely to stop Morales' quest to preserve power: he has until 2020 to try to extend his term again, and in December 2016, he announced plans to do so.

The ambition to remain in office is certainly not unusual among elected and non-elected rulers. As Bueno De Mesquita et al., claim: "We assume that political leaders in all systems are motivated by the same universal interest: the desire to remain in office" (793). But few elected presidents try to extend their term in office, and fewer succeed in their attempts. Why Morales has continually tried to extend his term in office?

I claim that Morales has tried three times—so far—to extend his term in office to a significant degree due to his risk-taking personality, especially his social risk-taking.² Presidents who attempt to change the constitution to relax their term limits run important risks. These heads of government cannot fully anticipate the consequences of their attempts because there are many things at stake that they do not control, such as the interests of other state powers and the reaction of the political class, voters and the press. If presidents fail in their attempts to relax their term limits, they may end up being overthrown, as occurred to Honduran President Manuel Zelaya in 2009 and Guatemalan President Jorge Serrano in 1993.

In this paper, I address this proposition by first showing the results of a survey that I conducted among experts in presidents. In this survey, I measured the individual differences (i.e., personality traits and background characteristics) of 165 presidents of all the Americas who governed one country for at least six months between 1945 and 2012. Among the individual differences measured was risk-taking. To measure risk-taking, experts (Nicholson et al.,) filled out the Risk-Taking Index (RTI), which asks about the individuals' relation to risk in six domains (recreational, health, career, financial, safety, and social risks). Using these measurements, and based on the judgment of eight experts, President Morales scored higher on risk-taking than the average of all the presidents in the sample, and higher than the average of Bolivian presidents. Interestingly, among the different dimensions of risk-taking, Morales scored particularly high on social risk-taking. But the data that comes from large-N quantitative analysis may contain some measurement

² The specialized literature has described social risk-taking as a behavior that may rise disapproval from others, usually entailing violating social norms (Mandel; Keltner and Buswell; Weber et al.,).

errors and therefore incorrectly depict some individuals as risk-takers. Therefore, I take a close look to Morales' trajectory. I examine relevant aspects of his public and adult life to trace whether he has exhibited risk-taking behavior.

In the next section I briefly discuss what risk-taking is, and present the results of the expert survey that I conducted. In the third section, I examine Morales' public trajectory. Since an entire biographical review is not possible, I focus on some specific aspects of his life that expose his relation to risk. I examine some key political decisions he made since he became a *cocalero* (coca leaf grower) and then as president (especially the nationalization of the hydrocarbon industry), his attempts to extend his term in office, how he managed physical violence, his foreign policy decisions and his relationship with the US government. I claim that all of these events reveal a consistent risk-taking personality that explains Morales behavior, offering a clue on the path that he might follow in office. In a fourth section, I conclude discussing why Morales has succeeded in his attempts to remain in power and why he is likely to continue succeeding.

1. Risk-Taking and Morales

Risk-taking can be defined as the willingness to lose something of value weighted against the potential to gain something of value (Kungwani). Risk is present in all areas of life. As Fischhoff and Kadvanly claim: "Risks are everywhere. They come from many sources, including crime, diseases, accidents, terror, climate change, finance, and intimacy. They exact their price in many ways, including money, health, safety, reputation, peace of mind, and self-esteem." (1)

Researchers differentiate between general and domain-specific tendencies toward risk (e.g., Weber et al., Dohmen et al.). These studies show that individuals can be risk-takers in some areas of life but risk-averse in others. This inconsistent behavior is rooted on the individual's perception of risk (Nicholson et al.). From a practical perspective, to understand the behavior of individuals it is relevant to examine both their general and their domain-specific risk-taking.

In a past work, I measured the individual differences (i.e., personality traits and background characteristics) of 165 presidents of all the Americas who governed for at least six months between 1945 and 2012. To measure personality traits, including risk-taking, I surveyed 911 experts of 26 nationalities, who

answered standardized psychometric questionnaires and items designed to measure the most important characteristics of leaders. In this survey, risk-taking was measured using the Risk Taking Index (RTI) from Nicholson et al. This scale captures a general propensity toward risk by examining the individuals' relation to risk in six domains (recreational, health, career, financial, safety, and social risks), as shown in the following Table.³ The scale asked raters to differentiate between the chief executives' behavior before reaching office and their behavior during their term. This distinction was necessary because heads of state have incentives to moderate their risk propensity once they are in office. Similarly, the conditions for risk-taking in office are influenced by unobserved factors that transcend the presidents' personality.

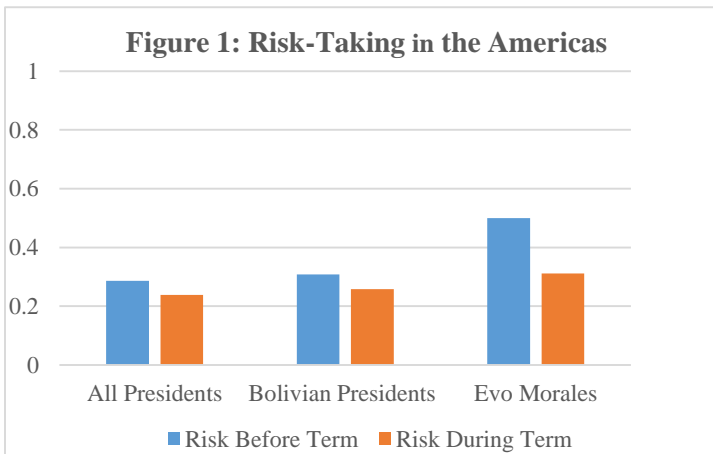
We are interested in the president's attitude towards risk. Do any of the following descriptions apply to the president before his term in office and during his term in office?		
	Before term Yes/ No	During term Yes/No
Recreational risks (e.g. rock-climbing, scuba diving)		
Health risks (e.g. smoking, poor diet, high alcohol consumption)		
Career risks (e.g. quitting a job without another to go to)		
Financial risks (e.g. gambling, risky investments)		
Safety risks (e.g. fast driving, city cycling without a helmet)		
Social risks (e.g. publicly challenging a rule or decision)		

Table: Risk Propensity
Source: Risk Taking Index, Nicholson et al.,

³ Three minor modifications of the RTI were introduced in the survey. First, the original scale uses a five-point scale that goes from “never” to “very often”. For simplicity, this five-point scale was simplified to a “yes” or “no” question. Second, while the RTI asks about the present and past behavior of individuals, I asked “before term” and “during term.” Finally, the original statement that captured social risks was followed with the examples “standing for election, publicly challenging a rule or decision”. I erased the first phrase given that most leaders stood for elections.

Each answer for the six dimensions of risk propensity was given a zero for “no” and 1 for “yes.” Following the literature (e.g., Steenbergen and Marks), the score of each dimension is the average score received by raters, and the score of risk-taking for each president is the average score for the six dimensions.⁴ Thus, a leader scores “0” when all raters agree that the chief of state did not engage in any dimension of risk behavior (a score of “1” means the opposite). Interestingly, asking about the presidents’ risk propensity before reaching the presidency and during their terms proved to be worthwhile: the average head of state was more risk-prone before taking office, supporting the expectation that leaders tend to consciously moderate their behavior once in office.

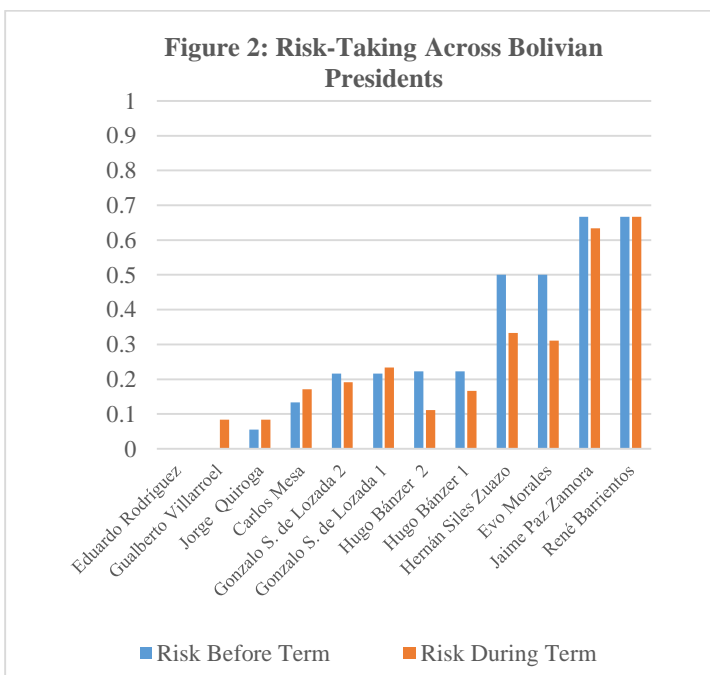
Figure 1 compares the risk-taking of President Evo Morales with the average of the other 164 presidents assessed and the average of the eight Bolivian presidents evaluated besides Morales, both before and during their terms. Noticeably, Morales was assessed as more of a risk-taker than the average president of the Americas was, and than the average of the Bolivian presidents.



Source: Author's elaboration based on his "Presidential Database of the Americas" unpublished database

⁴ When a rater did not fill out the risk dimension of a president, the score of the dimension was based on the score received by the other raters.

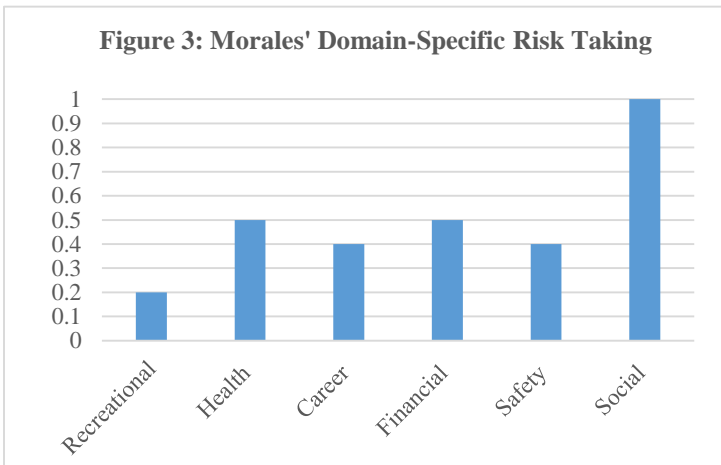
Figure 2 compares the risk-taking of the Bolivian Presidents who were assessed in the survey: Gualberto Villarroel (1943-1946), Hernán Siles Suazo (1956-1960, 1982-1985), Hugo Bánzer (1971-1978, 1997-2001), Jaime Paz Zamora (1989-1993), Jorge Quiroga (2001-2002), Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (1993-1997, 2002-2003), Carlos Mesa (2003-2005), Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé (2005), and Morales himself. The presidents from left to right are ordered from the least risk-taking to the most risk-taking (based on the before-term measurement).⁵ Noticeably, Morales is tied with Hernán Siles Zuazo as the third most risk-taking leader, just behind Jaime Paz Zamora and René Barrientos.



Source: Author’s elaboration based on his “Presidential Database of the Americas” unpublished database

⁵ Presidents who governed in different terms and received different scores for those terms are shown separately to show the (marginally distinct) results.

The preceding figures show that Bolivian presidents are, on average, more risk-taking than the presidents of the Americas taken as a group, and that Morales ranks among the most risk-taking Bolivian leaders. However, what specific aspects of risk-taking are relevant in Morales' personality? Figure 3 deconstructs Morales' domain-specific risk-taking. The graph is categorical: Morales does not score particularly high in recreational, health, career, financial and safety risk-taking, but is a high social risk-taker.



Source: Author's elaboration based on his "Presidential Database of the Americas" unpublished database

According to the specialized literature, social risk-taking entails potentially going against the social environment. It often involves violating social norms while others are watching (Keltner and Buswell). It includes behaviors such as confronting coworkers or family members, expressing your thoughts about an unpopular issue at a social event, or breaking up with an emotional partner (Weber et al.). Mandel, for example, defines a social risk as "one in which a negative outcome would result in embarrassment or disapproval among one's family or peers, whereas a positive outcome would result in approval or esteem among one's family or peers. It is risky to reveal oneself to others because the information provided could be a basis for rejection. A negative social outcome can threaten such intangibles as face,

identity, or approval” (Mandel 31-32). She adds that people who are more easily embarrassed tend to care more about social norms and about what others think of them.

Some experts that participated in the survey provided some explanation on their evaluation of Morales’ risk-taking: “When he was in the [political] opposition, his speeches and actions were of high political risk. He confronted the great political and economic powers. And, being president, his social, economic and political policies have bet for great turns,” said one specialist. “The biggest risk (he faced) was to be a *cocalero* leader, which almost cost him his life,” another one said.

The next section describes a behavior aligned with the notion of social risk-taking: throughout his public life, Morales has recklessly opposed his social environment. The next sections also explore a type of risky behavior that the expert surveyed overlooked: safety risk-taking. Morales has faced physical threats and violence on numerous occasions.

2. The Trajectory of Morales

The attempts made by President Morales to change the constitution to remain in power are not unique in Bolivian history. President Gualberto Villarroel (1943-1946) successfully tried in 1945 and Víctor Paz Estenssoro (1952-1956, 1960-1964, and 1985-1989) got away with his attempt in 1961. However, these changes did not help the leaders to remain in office. On July 21, 1946, an enraged mob broke in the *Palacio Quemado* (the governmental palace), assassinated Villarroel, threw his body from a balcony and then hung him from a lamppost. On November 4 1964, the Paz Estenssoro administration was overthrown in a military coup. Morales has been unique in the number of times he has tried and succeeded in extending his term in office. This section traces the relation between President Morales and risk-taking.

2.1. Adventurous Political Decisions

Morales decided to enter the public arena in a time of conflict in the early 1980s, when the *cocaleros* were confronting the government’s coca eradication policy. He soon stood out as one of the most outspoken and combative leaders of the movement, which put his life at risk in a number of ways. Then he made another critical decision: he started a career in a political party. Since Morales was not happy with his party’s leadership, the Assembly

for the Sovereignty of the People (Asamblea por la Soberanía de los Pueblos, ASP), he formed his own party. This decision would end up paving his way to the presidency. Once in power, he made several bold decisions at the international (see points 2.4 and 2.5) and domestic levels. In national affairs, besides the attempts to extend his term in office (analyzed in 2.2), Morales implemented a series of economic policies—starting with the nationalization of the hydrocarbons—that set him in opposition to some economic and regional elites.

Morales was born into an Aymaran family in extreme poverty on October 26, 1959. He and two siblings were the only three of María Ayma and Dionisio Morales' seven children who survived past childhood. He was born in the small rural village of Isallawi, in the Oruro Department, where he grew up farming, helping his parents with the crops and their herd of llamas and sheep.⁶ He attended high school in the city of Oruro while managing to work on the side as a brick-maker, baker, and trumpet player. In 1978, after serving in the one-year mandatory military service, Morales moved with his family to the Chapare province, in the Cochabamba Department. There the Morales family grew different crops until they started growing coca, because its prices were rising steadily and it was easy to cultivate. Morales soon learned the dominant indigenous language in the area, Quechua. In El Chapare, he made his first steps in public life, joining the local San Francisco trade union of coca growers. He would soon become the union's General Secretary.

Morales became engaged in politics in momentous times. Under US pressure, the Bolivian government was sending troops to burn coca crops and violently repressing coca growers. The eradication policy was shocking for the farmers' budgets. Although coca is a necessary plant for producing cocaine, in Bolivia—as in other countries from the region—it is a traditional product that has been widely chewed and used as tea for medicinal, nutritional, and religious purposes. Part of the rage erupted because the government failed to provide coca farmers with an alternative crop, and instead offered them small financial compensations.

The situation infuriated Morales, who got involved in the coca growers' movement and served as Secretary of Records from 1984 to 1985, and as Secretary General of the August Second Headquarters in 1985. The *cocalero* movement grew in importance during the eighties, staging protests between

⁶ Bolivia is a unitary state administratively subdivided in nine departments (equivalent to regions in other countries).

1984 and 1991. The movement occupied local government offices, blocked highways and roads, did hunger strikes, and organized mass protests and demonstrations.

Morales gained prominence within the movement during these years. His notoriety sharply increased when his soon-to-be nemesis reached power. Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, from the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement party (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, MNR), took office on August 6, 1993. Under pressure by the American Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Sánchez de Lozada would soon relaunch the campaign against coca farming by committing to eradicate 5,100 hectares of the crop by March 1994. Morales became an outspoken critic of Sánchez de Lozada's coca eradication policy, an opposition that ended with Morales being incarcerated more than once (more about this on 2.3). However, Morales' staunch opposition to the government gave him national and international recognition.

Morales started supporting the formation of a political wing of the *cocalero* movement by the end of the 1980s, but that ambition would take time to materialize. On March 27, 1995, the Unique Confederation of Rural Laborers of Bolivia (Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia, CSUTCB) formed the Assembly for the Sovereignty of the People (Asamblea por la Soberanía de los Pueblos, ASP), a political party that united farmers, miners, unions, peasants, and indigenous peoples. In 1996, Morales was appointed chairman of the Committee of the Six Federations of the Tropics of the Cochabamba Department, a position that he retained until 2006. Despite the fact that the ASP was not recognized by Bolivia's National Electoral Court—which accused the ASP of minor procedural infringements—the assembly ran under the banner of the United Left party. In the 1997 national elections, Morales became one of the four ASP candidates to Congress elected as deputy.

Morales was enjoying a comfortable position as an ASP leader. But that was not enough; his ambition was to become the undisputed leader of the party. Therefore, he made a bold decision once more: he split from the ASP and formed his own party, the Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos, IPSP). Morales' decision paid off: he gained significant support and the ASP became a marginal party. In 1998 he reached an agreement with David Ññez, leader of the inoperative but still registered party Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS), to take over the party name and fuse it with the IPSP. The MAS-IPSP (MAS from now on) would start as a party that had the coca farmers

as its central force, but would evolve to become a left-wing socialist party with a much broader political appeal.

Subsequent years saw an increase of civil unrest in different issues related to the widespread view that only a small elite group benefitted from the economic and political *status quo*. Numerous people died amid protests. In 2003, Sánchez de Lozada resigned after widespread protests and clashes between the police and activists that left 80 deaths and 411 injured. He was replaced by his vice president, Carlos Mesa, on October 17, 2003. Mesa had supported Sánchez de Lozada's resignation, and once in power he tried to implement some popular demands. But after 20 months, he was compelled to resign after a resurgence of roadblocks, riots, and protests led by the *cocalero* movement. Congress accepted Mesa's resignation on June 6, 2005. Mesa was replaced by the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé, who upon taking office convoked general elections for December 2005. This was an opportunity Morales wanted to seize.

During this time, the MAS underwent an internal restructuring that gave the party more independence from the social movements that supported it, in part to divorce the party leadership from radical rank-and-file. Until then, Morales' rise was up to a significant extent explained by the support he enjoyed from social movements.⁷ Morales picked the leftist intellectual Álvaro García Linera as his vice presidential candidate, a choice that would please some of the middle class and the ideological left.⁸

Morales won the December 18, 2005 election, receiving 53.7% of the votes and becoming the first presidential candidate to win an absolute majority since the restoration of democracy in 1983. Morales also became the first indigenous Bolivian president, which aligned him with the ethnic majority of

⁷ Dupre claims that social movements started to dominate mainstream Bolivian politics after they forced the government of Hugo Bánzer to make political and material concessions to indigenous protesters in 2000. From then onwards, social movements became key in helping the MAS to gain seats in Congress, to bring about the resignation of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2003, and to help Morales become president.

⁸ García Linera argues that the Morales administration has included the social movements in the government. According to him, the social movements are part of the internal structure of the MAS, their mobilization is key to advance the government's agenda, and their demands and policy positions are behind important strategic decisions and the selection of high positions in the state's administration. However, other scholars (e.g., Gutiérrez 2008) claim that Morales has separated social movements from the government.

the country. His closest opponent was the candidate of the center-right party Social and Democratic Power (Poder Democrático y Social, PODEMOS), Jorge Quiroga, who received only 28.6% of the vote.

Once in power, Morales would follow the same pattern that took him to the presidency: he would make risky decisions. In his inaugural speech, Morales condemned how Bolivia was governed until then and talked about “refounding” the country. He was plethoric of anti-neoliberal statements, reaffirming his intentions to reverse the policies of preceding governments.⁹ A central part of neoliberalism is privatizations, or the selling of state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private companies. Since taking office, Morales has led his country in the opposite direction, nationalizing several industries and companies, transferring privately-owned assets to the state.

A brief review of the four main nationalization processes that he has pursued are sufficiently revealing of his approach to risk. Morales nationalized the country’s hydrocarbons, the leading telecommunication company Entel, four power companies, and the electrical transmission company Transportadora de Electricidad. These nationalizations have entailed significant risks. They have led his government to confront local elites—in a country that has the world’s record in coups d’état—, foreign governments and multinational corporations.

On May 1, 2006, Morales issued Supreme Decree 2870 to “nationalize” the country’s national gas industry. Morales raised the profit taxes from 18% to 82%, and despite gas companies threatened to leave the country or sue the state at international courts, they eventually accepted the policy change. The decree refunded the state company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB), repurchasing a majority of shares in the privatized companies and claiming public ownership over Bolivia’s oil and gas resources. The state, through YPFB, began to control the sales, transportation, and distribution of hydrocarbons and had a major say in relevant decisions related to the refining of raw materials. After the nationalization, the government renegotiated supply contracts with Brazil and Argentina, significantly raising the prices of gas exports. (Lefebvre and Bonifaz)

The hydrocarbons nationalization increased the state’s revenues. While the Bolivian state received \$US 173 million from the hydrocarbon extraction in

⁹ Neoliberalism proposes that unregulated capitalism leads to efficient economic transactions, economic growth, and increased prosperity. The state is considered to limit individual freedom and entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is expected to perform only functions that the private sector cannot perform (Oppenheim, 2007).

2002, it received \$US 1.3 billion in 2006 (Sivak 199–203). The nationalization allowed the government to increase social spending; more than 11% of the state's revenues became earmarked for indigenous groups, universities, and the monthly payment for all Bolivians over the age of 60 called *Renta Dignidad*. (Dignity Pension)

The second nationalization took place two years later. On May 1, 2008, Morales announced the nationalization of the country's leading telecommunication company Entel—which became Entelwas—allegedly to extend the telecommunications services to all the borders of the country. This nationalization allowed the government to acquire 50% of Entel's shares from Telecom Italia, but led to a bitter international legal dispute. The company sued the Bolivian state in the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, and in the International Court of Justice. The Bolivian government responded by suing the company in American courts. In the end, the dispute was settled in 2010 when the Bolivian government paid \$USD 100 million to Telecom, a tenth of what the company demanded (América Economía). This nationalization seemed to have paid off. The Morales administration recently claimed that an investment of \$USD 900 million in Entel in the last nine years allowed the company to double its income from \$USD 300 million in 2007 to nearly \$USD 600 million in 2015, besides increasing the coverage to the entire country and decreasing consumers' internet bills. (*La Razón*, April 23, 2016)

The third nationalization occurred on May 1, 2010. Morales issued Supreme Decree 493, nationalizing four power companies previously owned by the state through the National Electricity Company. "We're recovering the energy, the light, for all Bolivians," Morales said after taking control of the shares that French, British, and Bolivian private investors held in the biggest generating companies located in Corani, Guaracachi, Valle Hermoso, and Cochabamba (Reuters 2010).¹⁰ This action allowed the government to control 80% of Bolivia's electrical generation.

Finally, on May 1, 2012, Morales issued the Supreme Decree 1214 that nationalized the electrical transmission company Transportadora de Electricidad, taking control from Red Eléctrica Internacional SAU. The latter is a subsidiary of Spain's Red Eléctrica Española, which at the time owned and ran 73% of the power lines in Bolivia and provided 85% of the population with

¹⁰ All translations from texts originally in Spanish are mine.

electricity (LatinNews). The Bolivian president accused Transportadora de Electricidad of failing to invest adequately, and asserted that the nationalization was just recovering the property of the company, after it was privatized 10 years before. Bolivian soldiers peacefully took over the company's office in Cochabamba.

The numerous nationalizations threw the Bolivian government into a series of litigations at international courts, especially with foreign multinational companies. Throughout the process, the government was criticized domestically by the economic elite and some of the media, and internationally by foreign companies and governments. However, the strategy paid off over time. In 2016, Bolivia's General Procurator, Héctor Arce, announced that the state had reached agreements with eleven companies but was still facing six arbitration processes due to the nationalizations that took place between 2004 and 2012. (*Página Siete*)

2.2. The Constitutional Attempts

Morales won the 2005 presidential elections with a central campaign promise: to “refound” the country through the enactment of a new constitution. Morales did not come up with the idea of enacting a new constitution: Law 3091, promulgated by President Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé on July 6, 2005, authorized the president to convoke a constituent assembly to replace the constitution. The potential constitutional replacement had been a prominent issue in the previous years in Bolivia, and was part of Morales' campaign promises. However, Morales received no explicit mandate to conduct the constitutional replacement process as he did, and he avoided to discuss relaxing presidents' term limits during the campaign.

Soon after taking office on January 22, 2006, Morales started preparations to convoke a constituent assembly, which was finally elected on July 2. The election had the highest electoral turnout in the country's history. The MAS was highly successful; it won 137 of the 255 assembly seats. The assembly met for the first time on August 6 and soon it became clear that the enactment of a new charter was going to be a contested process.

There were bitter disputes about the content of the new charter and the procedures to approve it. The opposition was concentrated in the four departments—Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz, and Tarija—with the strongest secessionist claims, and which are usually referred to as the “media luna” due to their geographical resemblance to a half-moon. Law 3364, which convoked

the Constituent Assembly, required the assembly to approve the new constitution by a two-thirds majority. But once the assembly was elected, the MAS proposed that only a simple majority be required to approve most matters, making the two-thirds only necessary for issues that are more sensitive. The opposition accused the MAS of trying to change the rules to draft the constitution as they saw fit, since the government's party enjoyed a majority in the forum. After many rounds of negotiations, in February 2007 the assembly approved requiring an absolute majority for the text, with a *quorum* of two thirds needed to approve individual articles. The MAS incited student protests against the assembly, accusing the opposition of boycotting the final part of the assembly vote. This forced the assembly to be moved for protection to a military school outside the city of Sucre, where a preliminary draft was approved on November 24.

On December 8, the assembly was moved again due to safety concerns, now to the city of Oruro. Most members of the opposition boycotted the meeting, and on December 9 of 2007, the new charter was approved in an overnight session. Several opposition leaders and civil organizations claimed that the constitution was illegally approved and complained that a third of the constituent delegates were not present during the charter's approval. Although part of the opposition claimed that they would not recognize the new constitution, in the end they could not prevent its approval.

The assembly's draft was further revised. First, by an Editing Commission, which synthesized and modified the charter. This Commission presented its version to the Bolivian Congress on December 14, 2007. The charter was then further reviewed by the "Cochabamba dialogue" between Morales and opposition prefects (the elected leaders of Tarija, Santa Cruz, Beni, and Pando) in September of 2008. Finally, it was negotiated in Congress before being submitted for a referendum in October of 2008 (Prada). The referendum showed widespread support for the new constitution: voter turnout reached a peak of 90.24%, and 61.43% of the voters approved it. The charter was enforced on February 7, 2009.

During the constituent assembly, the MAS and Morales were very keen on minimizing the importance of relaxing the presidents' term limits. According to Rivera, the debate on term limits was neither open nor sustained, for two reasons. First, pro-government forces did not openly discuss their intention of allowing the immediate reelection of the president and the vice-president. The second one is that "the issue was relegated by others of greater political importance for the state," such as the adoption of a new state model, the

integration of diverse nations and indigenous groups into the constitution, the “recovery” of natural resources, the state decentralization and the inclusion of redistribution policies. (Rivera 24-25)

Nonetheless, opposition forces presented some resistance to the idea of relaxing the term limits. As a result, a transitional provision was included in the draft, supposedly with the purpose of preventing the reelection of Morales. The second paragraph of article 4 states: “The mandates prior to the validity of this Constitution shall be taken into account for the purpose of computing the new functions.” That clause was interpreted by the opposition as a guarantee that Morales could only be reelected once more after the 2005 election, given that his first term ended with the 2009 elections. But the opposition was naïve.

After the constitution was approved, the 2009 general election was held on December 6. Morales won his second presidential election receiving 64% of the popular vote, and with a voter turnout of 90%. Morales’ main opponent, Manfred Reyes Villa, only received 27% of the vote. The MAS won a two-thirds majority in both chambers of Congress.

The opposition’s interpretation of article 4 of the new constitution proved to be nothing more than illusion. The government argued that Morales was unable to finish his first term (2006-2010) because it was interrupted by the 2009 general elections. Pro-government forces in Congress turned Morales’ intentions to stay in power into an application to the Constitutional Court. In April 2013, Bolivia’s Constitutional Court authorized the president to run for a third term on that year’s general election. The Court decided that Morales was in fact in his first term, since his inauguration on January 22, 2010 counted as his first term under the “new” constitutional order. “The state has been refounded as a plurinational state and that refounding emerges from a constituent power that has generated a new Political Constitution that contemplates a new order,” stated as an explanation Ruddy Flores, president of the Constitutional Court (*El Mundo* 2013). This interpretation was bitterly contested by the opposition, but they could not alter the court’s decision.

Morales ran for the presidency for the third time on October 2014, winning in the first round with 61.36% of the votes, followed far behind by the Democrat Unity’s candidate (Unidad Democrática, UD), Samuel Doria Medina, who obtained 24.23% of the votes. The MAS also kept control of Congress, gaining 88 of the 130 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 25 seats in the 36-members Senate.

Morales' third consecutive victory allowed him to stay until 2020, effectively governing over four years more than any other leader since Bolivia's independence. But, soon after the election, Morales wanted to pave the way to secure permanent power.

At the end of 2015, Morales proposed a referendum to amend article 168 of the constitution in order to be allowed to run for a fourth term. Morales wanted to take advantage of his popularity and secure the opportunity early on in his term. After 17 hours of debate in Congress, the legislature eventually approved the referendum on November 5, 2015 (*El Mundo* 2015). The referendum took place on February 21, 2016. To the surprise of Morales and the MAS, 51% of voters rejected the president's attempt to reform the constitution.

Consistent with his trajectory, Morales viewed this defeat as a temporary one. Before the electoral results were known, Morales said that he was going to accept them. However, he later claimed that the results should be nullified because voters were influenced by a misinformation campaign (*New York Times*). On December 15, 2016, the IX Extraordinary Congress of the MAS party supported Morales' fourth candidacy for the 2019 elections. To achieve this without breaking the law, the MAS stated that they could pursue four paths (*El País*). One would be to pursue a new referendum, this time convoked by popular initiative. A second would be to have Morales resign six months before his term ends, so he could become a candidate. A third would be to get authorization from the Constitutional Court, and the fourth would be to allow Congress to amend the constitution to let Morales run for the presidency. Soon after the IX Extraordinary Congress, Morales alluded to the 2019 election saying that "if the people say so, Evo will remain with the people to continue to guarantee this democratic and cultural revolution". (CNN)

Although the mechanism that Morales may use to try to extend his term in office remains unclear, it seems clear that he will do his best to run for the 2020 presidential election. Considering that he has already faced and overcome all sorts of challenges to extend his term two times, and that his party controls Congress, the odds of succeeding one more time are in his favor.

2.3. Coping with Physical Risks

In their biography about Morales, Pinto and Navia describe the Bolivian President as someone who has been willing to accept physical risks as an

activist and as a politician, many times enduring physical violence and threats (110, 114-116, 120-125, 127).

The context in which Morales developed his political career was no game for kids. At the beginning of the 1980s, the United States started exerting pressure on Bolivian governments to eradicate coca cultivation from the country. These were years in which the Colombian drug cartels needed massive quantities of coca leaf, making it an attractive commodity for Bolivian farmers. Successive Bolivian administrations acquiesced to eradicate *cocaleros*, who fought back fiercely. Consequently, sporadic episodes of violence between *cocaleros* and the Bolivian security forces occurred between the mid-1980s and 2003. Although these confrontations politically strengthened the *cocalero* movement, it would physically suffer many losses.

Morales escaped death a number of times during this period. For example, in 1989, agents of the Rural Area Mobile Patrol Unit (Unidad Móvil Policial para Áreas Rurales, UMOPAR) beat him up and abandoned him to die in the mountains, but he was lucky to be rescued by other union members. Police agents attacked Morales one day after he gave a speech in which he criticized UMOPAR for massacring 11 coca farmers in Villa Tunari a year before. After this experience, Morales thought of creating a *cocalero* militia to fight back against state forces, but ended up choosing to combat politically.

Morales would suffer physical violence again during his opposition to the coca eradication policy advanced by the government of Sánchez de Lozada. In August of 1994 he was arrested, beaten, and incarcerated under sedition charges. In jail, he started a dry hunger strike and was released on September 7 after 3,000 peasants began a march to La Paz, the administrative capital city, to demand his liberation. He was arrested again in April of 1995, during a meeting of the Andean Council of Coca Producers that he was chairing. He was released after a week in prison.

Morales also held several hunger strikes as a *cocalero* leader, and then continued with them during his presidency. For instance, in 2009 he went on a dry hunger strike for five days in reaction to the political opposition's strategy to delay the 2009 election by demanding a new biometric registry system. Finally, Morales has faced numerous death threats during his public career and as recently as December 2016 (e.g., *La Razón*, Dec. 4, 2016). These threats, nonetheless, have never seemed to inhibit his behavior, just like other physical risks he has taken throughout his adult life.

2.4. Dramatic Turn in Foreign Policy

Morales led a dramatic change in Bolivia's foreign policy. He quickly engaged in international politics by developing relations with new government and leaders, often unfriendly to the United States. Morales also antagonized the United States, led international crusades to achieve regional integration, and promoted "anti-imperialist," "anti-neoliberal," and pro-indigenous worldviews.

As a leader of coca growers, Morales sought to internationalize the demands of the group he represented, in an effort to legitimize coca leaf consumption. He soon discovered that such a path would allow him to reach important audiences. As soon as he was elected, on December 29, 2005, he started a two-week international tour in which he visited many countries. While previous elected presidents tended to first visit the United States, Morales went to Cuba, Venezuela, Spain, France, China, South Africa, and Brazil to expand the international support for the incoming administration. This tour gave Morales significant international exposure, and he returned to Bolivia with much praise as well as many signed agreements of cooperation (with Brazil, Cuba, and Venezuela) and aid offers (from Spain, France and the Netherlands).

Bolivia also experienced an "anti-imperialist" and "anti-neoliberal" turn in its foreign policy (O'Keefe). Before and after taking office, Morales was an outspoken critic of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and especially the United States. This marked a strong shift compared to preceding administrations, which had often been submissive to the multilateral organizations and Washington's pressure. Morales rapidly built strong links with the Marxist regime in Cuba and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, leader of the United Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, PSUV) and a vocal critic of the United States and of neoliberalism. In April 2006, Morales agreed to join both countries in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (Alianza Bolivariana para América, ALBA). This left-leaning intergovernmental organization has eleven members and has the purpose of achieving the social, political, and economic integration of Latin American and Caribbean countries under the paradigm of social welfare and mutual economic aid. According to Sivak, under Morales Bolivia changed from being a friend of Washington to becoming "the least US-friendly government in Bolivian history" (160). The claim may not be an overstatement.

Consistent with the anti-imperialist turn, Morales became close to governments and leaders who opposed Washington, including Venezuela, Iran, Libya, Russia, Vietnam, and China. For instance, Morales visited Iran two times; calling the country which Washington considered a part of the “axis of evil” a friendly revolutionary country. While in Tehran, he signed cooperation agreements with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Morales also established diplomatic relations with Libya, personally visiting Libyan strongman Muammar al-Gaddafi and securing Libyan investments in Bolivia (Reuters 2008). Although these actions would have been unthinkable for previous administrations, Morales’ dramatic changes in foreign policy did not destabilize the country in political and economic terms, as several critics expected.

2.5. Confronting the US government

Morales was an uncomfortable figure for the United States early on. American officials pushed to have Mr. Morales expelled from Congress during the government of President Jorge Quiroga (2001-2002). Eventually, in 2002 a majority of pro-government deputies (140) approved ousting Morales, who was accused of being responsible for the death of four police officers due to his inflammatory language. This event helped to victimize Morales before the public opinion, and he and the MAS gained popularity as a major protest force amid the widespread dissatisfaction that poor urban and rural Bolivians had with the political class.

After winning his first presidential election, Morales did not wait much to criticize the United States president. “[George W.] Bush is the only terrorist, because he is the only one who intervenes militarily in the affairs of other countries,” a recently elected Morales said to the news organization Al-Jazeera. (Telam-Sni)

In 2006, Morales gave a speech at the United Nations headquarters in New York in which he again accused Bush of being a terrorist for invading Iraq and Afghanistan, and called to move the headquarters out of the US. In December, he issued a Supreme Decree that demanded all US citizens visiting Bolivia to pay for a visa, in reciprocity for the amounts that Bolivians pay to get an American visa. Since Morales’ government refused to grant legal immunity to US soldiers in Bolivia, the US cut its military support to the country by 96%.

Morales' defiance of the US reached a new height on September 2008, when it was revealed that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had given \$USD 4.5 million to the regional governments of the *media luna* departments. Morales accused US ambassador Philip Goldberg of "conspiring against democracy" after the ambassador was recorded leaving the office of an opposition prefect.¹¹ Morales ordered him to leave the country, which made Goldberg the last US ambassador in Bolivia. The US expelled the Bolivian ambassador, Gustavo Guzmán, in retaliation. Morales escalated the conflict expelling the US DEA, accusing its agents of espionage, supporting opposition separatists, conspiring to overthrow him, and killing farmers. The US reacted withdrawing the Peace Corps from Bolivia. The bilateral relation would only improve when Barack Obama was elected to lead the White House. In November 2009, the countries started negotiations to restore diplomatic relations, which eventually occurred in November 2011. But there always was some tension. Morales called for a revocation of Obama's Nobel Peace Prize after the US backed a NATO military intervention in Libya (Lovell 2011), and he never allowed the DEA back into Bolivia.

Morales has sought to antagonize the United States in numerous other ways. For example, in the summer of 2013 he said that he would consider giving political asylum to Edward Snowden, the former contractor for the US government who copied and leaked classified information from the National Security Agency, NSA. That statement caused an international uproar. Morales made the statement on his way back from Russia. Since the US suspected that Morales could be hiding Snowden in his plane, Washington asked several countries to deny Morales access to their airspace, a request with which Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal complied. Morales was forced to land for 14 hours in Austria. The governments of Argentina, Uruguay, Ecuador, Suriname, and Venezuela rallied to Morales' side and demanded an apology from the European countries that denied the airspace. Morales later declared that Bolivia did not need a US embassy and that he could close it, adding that doing so would be better for the country's democracy.

3. Discussion

The expert survey showed that Morales is a risk-prone individual, above the mean of all the Bolivian presidents assessed and the mean of all the leaders

¹¹ Prefects (since 2010 governors) lead the departments in Bolivia.

of the Western Hemisphere as a group. In particular, Morales was rated as a high social risk-taker, defined as someone who is willing to go against his social environment. The review of Morales' trajectory showed that Morales has consistently been an extreme risk-taker throughout his adult public life. Morales won the presidency after making a series of bold decisions in which the outcome was uncertain. He entered politics in a moment of violent struggle between coca farmers and the government. Unsatisfied with his party's leadership, Morales formed and led a new political party. He continued fighting despite being arrested, beaten, and threatened. In the presidency, he has made a number of risky decisions. Morales has conducted a series of nationalizations of important industries, facing the opposition of local elites, multinational corporations, and foreign governments. In the international realm, Morales has led an active foreign policy that marked a complete shift from previous administrations. The confrontations with the US government, development of strong alliances with countries that antagonize the US, and Bolivia's participation in organizations such as ALBA plunged the Morales administration into significant uncertainty in regards to the international realm. Besides making decisions that entailed significant risks in domestic and international politics, Morales has been willing throughout his entire adult life to take safety risks. He has been beaten almost to death, been incarcerated, received death threats and undergone hunger strikes. In summary, both the survey and the close examination of Morales' trajectory suggest that the Bolivian President is a high risk-taker, especially in the social and safety domains.

This analysis suggests a causal relationship between Morales' risk-taking personality and his attempts to extend his term in office. Given Morales' consistently high risk-taking trajectory, he is likely to continue trying to remain in power. Although this research has produced insightful results, it also has some limitations. The first and most obvious is that besides Morales' personality, there are other factors that may explain his attempts to extend his term and that were not considered on this text.

An alternative explanation for the willingness of Morales to hold onto power is that he has essentially been following the will of his supporters. Both Morales and his vice-president Álvaro García Linera have described their government as an instrument of the MAS and social movements. From this perspective, Morales' attempts to remain in power are simply a reflection of the bottom-up pressure he receives from his adherents. However, there are two reasons to question this explanation. First, as described throughout this

paper, Morales is a social risk-taker who has no problem opposing social pressures. Therefore, if he were not personally interested in holding onto power, he would have no problem stepping down. Second, although the support of social movements and the MAS have been key to Morales' rise to power, he reached the highest position in the country after an ambitious career in which he faced –and overcame– some adversaries. For instance, he competed with Alejo Véliz in the first years of the MAS history to become the dominant figure in the party (Laserna). He also contended with the Aymara leader Felipe Quispe, *el Mallku*, to gain authority over that indigenous group. To sum up, although the MAS and social movements can put pressure on Morales to extend his term in office, arguably Morales would not hold to power unless it is his personal ambition.

While Morales' risk-taking is likely to explain his ambitions to hold to power, there are three variables that may help to understand why he has succeeded. One of these variables has been Morales' popularity. His approval rates allowed him to enjoy a political majority in the Constituent Assembly. Without such support, the new constitution would probably have been more explicit in setting term limits for Morales. That popularity also allowed Morales to win three consecutive elections. Second, the MAS majority in Congress has allowed Morales to advance his political agenda, was central to introduce adjustments to the 2009 constitution in favor of Morales, submitted the request to allow their leader to run for the presidency for a third term to the Constitutional Court in 2013, and approved the call for a referendum that asked Bolivian voters in 2016 whether Morales could run for a fourth term. A third relevant variable is the level of judicial independence. Different authors have already stressed that little judicial independence exists in Bolivia (ICJ, HRW). Arguably, the Morales administration's informal control over the judicial power explains the court's decision to allow him to run for the 2014 presidential election. The three variables mentioned are likely to impact whether Morales will be able to run for a fourth term. Noticeably, among the four possibilities that the MAS has noted as ways to reelect Morales in 2019 (described on section 2.2), one would be based on congressional approval, a second would be based on the approval of the Constitutional Court, and a third would be based on popular support. As long as he can rely on these popular, congressional, and judicial pillars, he is likely to succeed in his attempt to remain in power beyond 2020.

Morales' attempts to remain in power through constitutional changes are not unique in Latin America. Among the 303 presidents who governed a Latin

American country for at least six months between 1945 and 2012, 32 leaders tried 40 times to extend their term in office (Arana Araya 59-60). These attempts, especially when they were successful, have eroded regional democracies. To begin with, these leaders have relativized the value of the most important political documents in their countries—constitutions—by adapting them to remain in office. The signal that they send is that if one is powerful enough, one can adapt the rules of the political game to serve personal ambitions. Second, the rulers that can stay in office for more time enjoy the ability to use public resources to generate an electoral majority, decreasing the chances of power alternation. Third, leaders who stay in office longer can personalize politics by submitting other state powers under their leadership. All of these consequences lead to a weakening of the rule of law and the legitimacy of democratic institutions. So far, the administration of Morales has achieved numerous economic and social successes. Just to mention two, the country's per capita GDP has tripled since Morales took office, and the indigenous population has gained unprecedented legal recognition and political representation (Moreno). Nonetheless, Morales has overstretched the country's democratic institutions with his agenda of retaining power, and may well end up becoming the leading undertaker of Bolivia's fragile democracy.

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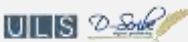
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