

Bolivia's 2025 Election

August 22, 2025

Executive Summary

Bolivia's August 17 election delivered a major blow to the ruling Movement for Socialism (MAS), marking its weakest performance in two decades. Centrist candidate Rodrigo Paz Pereira (Christian Democratic Party) secured 32.1% of the vote, followed by conservative former president Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga (Libre Alliance) with 26.9%. For the first time since 1982, Bolivia will hold a presidential runoff on October 19, after no candidate surpassed the 40% threshold.

Economic hardship, with soaring inflation and dwindling foreign reserves, drove voters away from MAS, which collapsed into single digits. Paz gained momentum after rival Samuel Doria Medina endorsed him, while Quiroga pushes for free-market reforms. Both candidates propose ending costly fuel subsidies to address fiscal challenges.

The outcome will shape Bolivia's geopolitical stance, resource governance and lithium strategy, as the country holds 38% of global reserves. A rightward shift could realign Bolivia with Western institutions, distancing it from China, Russia and Iran.

Rodrigo Paz leads as Bolivia heads to a historic runoff

On August 17, Bolivians voted in a pivotal election that marked the sharpest decline for the ruling Movement for Socialism (MAS) in two decades. According to preliminary results from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) with over 90% of ballots counted, Centrist Senator Rodrigo Paz Pereira (Christian Democratic Party), son of former president Jaime Paz Zamora, unexpectedly led the vote with 32.1%, followed by conservative former president Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga (Libre Alliance) with 26.9%. Pre-election polls had shown Samuel Doria Medina (National Unity Front), a wealthy businessman and former planning minister, as one of two frontrunners alongside Quiroga, who served as interim president and vice president under former military leader President Hugo Banzer.

In a surprising turn, Medina swiftly endorsed Paz, giving the centrist candidate a significant advantage heading into the second round. MAS candidates collapsed into single digits with the weakest performance since before Evo Morales's rise.

With no candidate surpassing 40% with a 10-point lead, the candidates will compete in a runoff for the first time since Bolivia's 1982 return to democracy scheduled for October 19.

Bolivia's economic crisis drove voters toward alternatives.

With a high turnout, surpassing 80% of the electorate, this election was defined by deep economic crisis. Inflation is at a four-decade high, foreign reserves are nearly exhausted and the government is forced to choose between servicing debt and importing fuel and food. A collapse in natural gas production, Bolivia's top export and the engine of MAS's subsidy model, has choked dollar inflows, producing widespread shortages and soaring prices. Both Paz and Quiroga have pledged to dismantle long-standing fuel subsidies, a politically combustible but fiscally unavoidable measure.

Congressional elections strip MAS of majority

Alongside the presidential vote, Bolivians elected 130 members of the House of Representatives and 36 Senators. Preliminary results indicate MAS lost the absolute majority it has held since 2006. Control of the bicameral legislature will be critical for governing from 2025–2030, as the next president will require congressional support to pass fiscal and structural reforms.

Political violence risks cloud runoff

The campaign was marred by 42 violent election-related incidents by late July, a 62% increase compared to the 26 events reported in the 2020 election. The 2025 cycle stood out for the variety of incidents, which include violent demonstrations, mob violence, hostage-taking and attacks with tear-gas grenades and other explosive devices containing dynamite. Former president Evo Morales, who was barred from running, celebrated the 19% null vote as his own political “victory,” claiming it won nationwide and arguing the results lack legitimacy. Morales has convened meetings with allies to determine the next steps, underscoring his ongoing role as a disruptive force on the left despite MAS’s electoral collapse. Morales mobilization could potentially heighten risks ahead of the runoff.

Geopolitical implications of a rightward shift

The October 19 outcome will determine whether Bolivia, a nation of 12 million with the world’s largest lithium reserves and major rare earth deposits, joins Latin America’s broader rightward trend, alongside leaders like Argentina’s Javier Milei, Ecuador’s Daniel Noboa and El Salvador’s Nayib Bukele. A right-wing government could trigger a major geopolitical realignment, distancing Bolivia from its current ties to Venezuela, China, Russia and Iran, and repositioning the country toward the United States and Western institutions.

Metals, Energy and Commercial Outlook

Bolivia’s vast mineral wealth, particularly its lithium reserves, remains at the forefront of the country’s political discourse. With an estimated 21–23 million tons of lithium reserves (38% of global supply) concentrated in the Uyuni salt flats, Bolivia possesses immense strategic potential in the global energy transition. However, its commercial performance has lagged significantly, with only 600 tons of lithium carbonate produced in 2022, compared to Chile and Argentina’s combined 45% share of global output. Addressing these gaps while balancing domestic and international interests has become a critical focus for policymakers.

In the lead-up to the recent elections, resource governance emerged as a pivotal issue. Just days before the vote, Congress approved a US\$975 million contract between Yacimientos de Litio Bolivianos (YLB), Bolivia’s state-owned strategic enterprise responsible for managing and industrializing the country’s vast lithium resources and Russia’s Uranium One Group to establish a lithium carbonate plant in Potosí.

Leading candidates’ current stance on commercial and mineral wealth

The second round of elections will likely position Bolivia's commercial and mineral wealth as a central topic of debate. The stances of the two leading candidates, Rodrigo Paz and Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga, offer distinct visions for the nation's resource strategy and economic future.

Rodrigo Paz Decentralization and "Capitalism for Everyone" campaign: Paz's platform emphasizes domestic empowerment, decentralization and value retention. His proposals focus on channeling resources into regional governments, universities and cooperatives to foster local economic development while reducing foreign dependence. Key economic proposals include:

- Agenda 50/50: Paz advocates for an equitable distribution of resource revenues, splitting them evenly between the central government and subnational authorities to reduce regional dependency on La Paz.
- "Capitalism for Everyone": A campaign aimed at expanding access to credit, lowering taxes and reducing tariffs on non-domestically produced goods to fuel economic growth.
- Mineral Sector Strategy: Paz proposes the establishment of a dedicated mining bank to reduce reliance on Chinese financing and extend credit to small-scale miners. Paz envisions annual revenues of \$600 million from lithium and \$2.5 billion from gold under his "intelligent energy capitalism" framework, positioning Bolivia as a self-reliant player in the global mineral market.

Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga Global Integration and Liberalization campaign: Quiroga's platform is marked by aggressive international integration and market liberalization. He envisions Bolivia as a key player in a South American lithium "triangle" alongside Chile and Argentina, proposing the creation of a "Lithium OPEC (OPEL)" to coordinate exports and attract downstream battery manufacturing investments. Key economic proposals include:

- Market Liberalization campaign: Quiroga advocates for signing multiple free trade agreements (FTAs), particularly with the United States, to integrate Bolivia into global markets.
- Economic stance: Quiroga frames liberalization as essential to attracting foreign capital and multilateral financing from institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and IDB. He suggests reconsidering Bolivia's membership in BRICS and adopting a more assertive stance toward Mercosur.
- Mineral Sector Strategy: Quiroga proposes rolling back state dominance in the sector, introducing concessions and risk-sharing schemes for state-owned enterprises like YPFB without outright privatization. He focuses on positioning Bolivia as a global supplier by aligning its lithium sector with international standards and unlocking access to advanced technologies.

What to watch after October 19

Bolivia's next government will face several pivotal challenges in shaping its resource strategy. These include navigating a fragmented Congress, balancing regional and global partnerships and passing critical legislation to unlock the country's potential.

The passage of a lithium law, hydrocarbons law and mining law will be essential to defining royalty-sharing terms, concession models, local content requirements and environmental standards. With liberal opposition blocs holding a fragmented majority, coalition-building will be critical to advancing these reforms.

The new government's stance on Iran and Bolivia's rare-earths cooperation will signal a broader shift in foreign policy. Quiroga has vowed to distance Bolivia from Tehran, while Paz has suggested a more cautious realignment toward Western partners. These decisions will influence Bolivia's attractiveness to U.S. and EU investors, risk premia and global supplier relationships.

The potential for trilateral cooperation with Argentina and Chile in the lithium sector will test Bolivia's ability to move beyond raw material exports toward higher value-added activities, such as battery manufacturing.