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FEATURED Q&A

Why Has a Census Delay Sparked Protests in Bolivia?



Bolivian President Luis Arce's administration postponed the country's census to 2024, a move that led to protests. // File Photo: Bolivian Government.

Q Bolivian President Luis Arce and 10 mayors from the country's main cities agreed on July 27 to launch a commission in order to inform Bolivians on the details of a contentious census. The census was originally scheduled for November of this year, but Arce's administration postponed it to 2024, resulting in protests against the change. Some civil society groups and politicians have raised concerns about communities being undercounted in the census, resulting in underrepresentation in Bolivia's legislature. Why has Arce's administration decided to push the census back by almost two years, and what are the arguments for and against the decision? How likely is a compromise between the two sides of the debate? Why is Bolivia's census a point of such contention?

A Daniel E. Moreno Morales, senior researcher at Ciudadanía, Comunidad de Estudios Sociales y Acción Pública: "The Bolivian census results define, among many other relevant things, the number of national elected seats for each region of the country, as the law provides for population representation. The current distribution of seats in the lower chamber, elected in 2020, is based on population figures from the latest census, conducted in 2012 (each department has four Senate seats, independent of the population). The next national election will be conducted in 2025, and the number of seats for each region will be based on the results of the new census. That is, unless these results are not officially available by the time of the election, in which case the distribution of seats among departments and regions

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Peru's Castillo Keeps Prime Minister in Role

Peruvian President Pedro Castillo late Friday rejected the resignation of his prime minister, Anibal Torres, and said Torres committed to continue working for the country.

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BUSINESS

Study Expected to Recommend More Refining Capacity at Petrobras

A study commissioned by former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidential campaign is expected to recommend an increased refining capacity at state oil company Petrobras.

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POLITICAL

Petro Takes Office as Colombia's First Leftist President

Gustavo Petro, a former guerrilla who once fought the Colombian state, was inaugurated on Sunday as the country's first leftist president.

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Petro // Photo: Colombian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Petro Takes Office as Colombia's First Leftist President

Gustavo Petro, a former guerrilla who once fought against the Colombian state, on Sunday took office as the country's first leftist president, vowing to reduce poverty and hunger, redistribute wealth and also to strengthen peace by launching talks with armed groups, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. Petro, 62, who also served for several years in Colombia's Congress and as mayor of Bogotá, took the oath of office in the capital's Plaza de Bolívar before a crowd of thousands of people, the *Financial Times* reported. Also on Sunday, Francia Márquez, an environmental activist, took office as Colombia's first Black vice president. "We are here against all odds ... against those who did not want to let go of power. But we did it," said Petro. "It's the hour of change. Our future has not been written," Petro added, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. In his inaugural address, Petro called for higher taxes on the rich and for more inclusive policies. "Equality is possible if we are able to generate wealth for all ... and if we are able to distribute it more fairly," he said. Petro, who has criticized the U.S.-backed war on drugs, said he would change the way Colombia fights drug traf-

fickers. "Peace is possible if we change the policies against drugs," he said. The United States has several opportunities for greater collaboration with Colombia, Michael Shifter, a senior fellow and former president of the Inter-American Dialogue told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Friday. "The United States is keen to fashion a productive relationship with Colombia's first leftist government, knowing that Petro has been a fierce critic of U.S. anti-narcotics policy and the U.S.-Colombia trade deal," said Shifter.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Analysts See Inflation of Up to 7.5% in Peru: Central Bank Survey

Peru-based analysts and market participants increased their 2022 inflation forecasts for the country to between 6.5 percent and 7.5 percent, up from the previously projected range of 6 percent to 7 percent, a monthly central bank survey showed on Friday, Reuters reported. The Andean country's annual inflation in July reached its highest level since 1997 at 8.74 percent, a figure that was driven by high food and energy prices amid growing global prices related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the wire service reported. The central bank's

NEWS BRIEFS

Peru's Castillo Keeps Prime Minister in Role, Taps New Finance Chief

Peruvian President Pedro Castillo late Friday rejected the resignation of Prime Minister Aníbal Torres who said earlier in the week that he was stepping down, Reuters reported. In a tweet, Castillo said Torres had committed to continue working for the country. Keeping Torres in the position keeps Castillo from having to seek a confidence vote from Congress. Also on Friday, Castillo named center-left economist Kurt Burneo as finance minister, replacing Óscar Graham in the post.

Cuba Reports Progress in Containing Fire at Oil Storage Facility

Cuba reported progress on Sunday in containing a fire that killed one firefighter at its main oil storage facility, Reuters reported. A lightning strike on Friday led to the fire at the Matanzas super tanker port, east of Havana. A second storage tank caught fire at the facility on Saturday, injuring more than 100 people, five of them critically. Dozens of Mexican and Venezuelan personnel arrived in Cuba on Sunday to help fight the blaze.

Tullow Oil to Abandon Drilling at Block Off Guyana's Coast

London-based oil company Tullow Oil is set to abandon its drilling operations at the Beebei-Potaro exploration well in the Kanuku block off Guyana, the company said Friday, Reuters reported. Tullow Oil holds 37.5 percent of the Kanuku block and said that it would work with its joint venture partners before deciding on next steps. While Tullow Oil said that the well had displayed a "good quality reservoir" in its primary and secondary targets, the company said that the well was water-bearing, the wire service reported.

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will have to remain based on the 2012 census. During the last few decades, Bolivia has transitioned from a rural society to a country where three-fourths of the population lives in urban areas. Among them, Santa Cruz de la Sierra has become the largest city in the country, and it keeps welcoming migrants from other departments at very high rates. MAS, the president's party, has been historically outperformed by the opposition in urban areas and particularly in Santa Cruz. The national statistics institute, INE, an institution depending directly on the presidency

through the planning ministry, is responsible for organizing the census, scheduled by law for this year. But INE failed to prepare the census adequately to be conducted in time, and it had to be postponed to a later date, still undetermined, but likely in 2024. Will the new census results be ready before the 2025 elections? If so, the number of seats in areas where the ruling party performs well is likely to drop, potentially shifting the balance of power in favor of the opposition. Much of the contention on the date of the census has to do with this fact."

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poll noted that market participants in Peru expect the local economy to expand between 2.5 percent and 3 percent this year, while the central bank foresees 3.1 percent growth in the local economy. Last month, the central bank

Peru's annual inflation rate in July reached 8.74 percent, its highest level since 1997.

hiked its benchmark interest rate by 50 basis points to 6 percent, the highest rate in 13 years, the wire service reported. Peru's then-finance minister, Óscar Graham, on July 14 told foreign reporters that the government estimates the economy will grow 3.6 percent by the end of this year, Reuters reported in July. Last month, Peru's accumulated inflation for this year reached 5.64 percent, according to the country's national statistics institute, or INEI, Agencia EFE reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Study Seeks Stronger Refining Capacity at Brazil's Petrobras

A study on the Brazilian oil and gas industry commissioned by former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidential campaign is expected to recommend that the government bolster state oil company Petrobras' refining capacity, including by reversing refinery privatizations, study co-author William Nozaki told Reuters, the wire service reported Friday. "For some assets, it is possible to consult the partners who acquired them to ... find out if they are really interested in fully remaining in the operation, said Nozaki. One of the potential projects to regain is the RLAM refinery in Bahia, which Petrobras first divested under its 2019 agreement with antitrust regulator CADE to end its monopoly in Brazilian refining, the wire service reported. The study is also

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

Does Ecuador's Lasso Face More Social Discontent?

Q **Ecuadorean President Guillermo Lasso on July 5 appointed Pablo Arosemena as the country's new minister of economy and finance, replacing Simón Cueva, who resigned. Health Minister Ximena Garzón and Transportation Minister Marcelo Cabrera also were among the top government officials who stepped down in the cabinet shakeup. What are the reasons behind the officials' departures, and are more resignations expected? What will Arosemena's appointment mean for Ecuador's economic policy? How might the cabinet shakeup affect Lasso's political standing and his ability to pursue his agenda?**

A **Ximena Sosa, co-chair of Ecuadorean Studies at the Latin American Studies Association:** "President Lasso's new cabinet includes ministers who might be able to contribute to the pursuit of his agenda. The 18 days of protests in June and the National Assembly's proposal to impeach the president left Lasso in a shaky position. He needed to change some ministers in his cabinet. Economy Minister Pablo Arosemena has a less orthodox view of the economy as compared to his predecessor, Simón Cueva. Lasso prioritized foreign investment, believing that it would increase employment. However, most Ecuadoreans, especially in rural areas, did not think that this economic situation benefitted their lives. Arosemena is part of the ongoing talks with the strongest Indigenous organization, CONAIE. In their

set to recommend new investments and the resumption of abandoned refinery projects. "The guidance given by Lula is that nothing will be done in a traumatic way for shareholders or for Petrobras' investments," said Nozaki. "Lula asked us to put all the available options on the table, from a technical point of view, and

first meeting, they agreed on issues related to public and private banking. This included forgiveness of debts up to \$3,000, restructuring of debts of up to \$10,000 in the public treasury and more access to credit through its provision under better conditions (with interest rates of 1 percent to 5 percent) for popular sectors and rural areas. Hopefully, these measures will alleviate the debts that microentrepreneurs have and boost hiring. Ximena Garzón was also replaced by José Ruales, a former vice minister, who has experience in public health issues. Ruales has promised to change the way the health system has worked. He will seek to implement digital systems through digital clinical histories and better control over medicines and supplies. This has been a major complaint of the health insurance system. Another good measure is the application of a comprehensive health system, which means that the Ministry of Health, the Ecuadorean Institute of Social Security, the Social Security Institute of the National Police, the Social Security Institute of the Armed Forces and the private sector will work together. These two new ministers might be able to ease the biggest problems that Lasso faces: unemployment and the lack of a good public health system."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the Q&A published in the July 27 issue of the Advisor.

to think about how to face the problem of fuel inflation," he added. Lula continues to lead in surveys against President Jair Bolsonaro, with 44 percent of voter support ahead of the October first round vote to Bolsonaro's 32 percent vote, Reuters reported Aug. 3, citing a newly released Genial/Quaest poll.

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A **V. Ximena Velasco-Guachalla, lecturer in the Department of Government at the University of Essex:** “On July 13, President Arce approved Decree 4760 confirming the postponement of the national census to 2024. It is worth emphasizing that concerns about a possible delay had already been around since last year. Some of the arguments presented to justify the postponement have included delays caused by Covid-19, a need to educate the public about the census and the updating of statistical cartography, in addition to weather conditions and inter-

“**If the census takes place in 2024, the official results may not be used in the 2025 national elections.**”

— V. Ximena Velasco-Guachalla

nal migration. Among the concerns of those opposed to the delay is, on the one hand, the distribution of financial resources that governors, mayors and public universities aspire to receive, and on the other, the redistribution of legislative seats among the nine departments. Related to the latter, the biggest concern is that if the census takes place in 2024, the official results may not be used in the 2025 national elections. Acknowledging the lack of technical capacity to successfully carry out the census this November, there is now a consensus, although not generalized, on the delay. However, the point of contention is the time of delay, with some demanding that it be carried out in 2023. A crucial point, absent from the current debate, is the effect that the postponement—and the lack of transparency throughout the process—has on trust in government officials and political institutions; that is, trust that the government can fulfill its obligations. Trust in political institutions has been falling, the percentage of those who report having ‘no

trust’ increased from 25 percent in 2017, to 32 percent in 2018, to 37 percent in 2020. Situations like this can only deepen mistrust, and solutions must come from consensus and commitment.”

A **Gonzalo Mendieta Romero, partner at Mendieta Romero & Asociados:** “As much as reactions of public agencies and officials in charge allow to infer, the state is in no technical capacity to carry out the census this year, in spite of legal duties to conduct it every 10 years (it was last conducted in 2012). President Arce’s administration is also reluctant to ignite the disputes that census results usually prompt, even in locations where the government tends to prevail. Hence, Arce would rather hold the census just one year prior to the next general elections (in 2025). Censuses are usually contentious due to their effects on public resources and legislative seat allocations, though the legal framework does not impose a strict correlation between them. As the eastern part of Bolivia is growing at a faster pace than the western part, and key players of the opposition are in the former, the opposition also believes it may be able to reap some benefits out of the discontent arising from a postponement. A compromise may only come after both sides are able to show their strength in the streets, however, as local political culture seldom rewards incremental or trade-off agreements, irrespective of who leads the state or the opposition. In an eventual compromise, 2023 appears as the likelier halfway, but solely after a showdown plays out. For example, social organizations from El Alto, a city typically favorable to Arce, have demanded the census take place no later than 2023. That may signal what the political constraints to the government’s intentions are.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gene.kuleta@thedialogue.org.

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