

Morales suffers setbacks in key votes

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LA PAZ, Bolivia - (AP) -- Compromise hasn't always come easily to Evo Morales, who led street protests that drove two presidents from office before winning the job himself. Now he will have to cut deals with bitter political foes if he wants his populist revolution codified in a new constitution.

Five months into Morales' presidency, voters chose a National Assembly on Sunday that will overhaul this corruption-tainted nation's constitution.

But Morales' allies failed to win the two-thirds majority needed to solidify their attempt to remake Bolivia. And voters in four of Bolivia's nine states dealt Morales another blow by opting overwhelmingly for greater political and economic autonomy, unofficial results showed.

Morales didn't seek consensus when he nationalized Bolivia's natural gas industry and began distributing untilled land to poor peasants. Now he will need it if he's to push an agenda that includes distributing Bolivia's wealth more equitably and ending centuries of discrimination against the indigenous majority.

His Movement Toward Socialism Party won 135 seats in the 255-member assembly, compared with 64 seats for the main opposition party, Podemos, according to a sampling of ballots at more than 1,000 polling stations done by a subsidiary of British polling firm MORI International Group. Smaller opposition parties split the remainder. The MORI sample had a 1 percent margin of error.

First official results, released on Monday, indicated a MAS victory, but with only 2 percent of the vote counted were not a reliable reflection of the vote.

A subdued Morales attempted to put the best face on the outcome. "This support gives us more force to keep changing Bolivia," he said.

The assembly convenes Aug. 6 and has a year to rewrite the constitution, which must then be endorsed in a nationwide referendum.