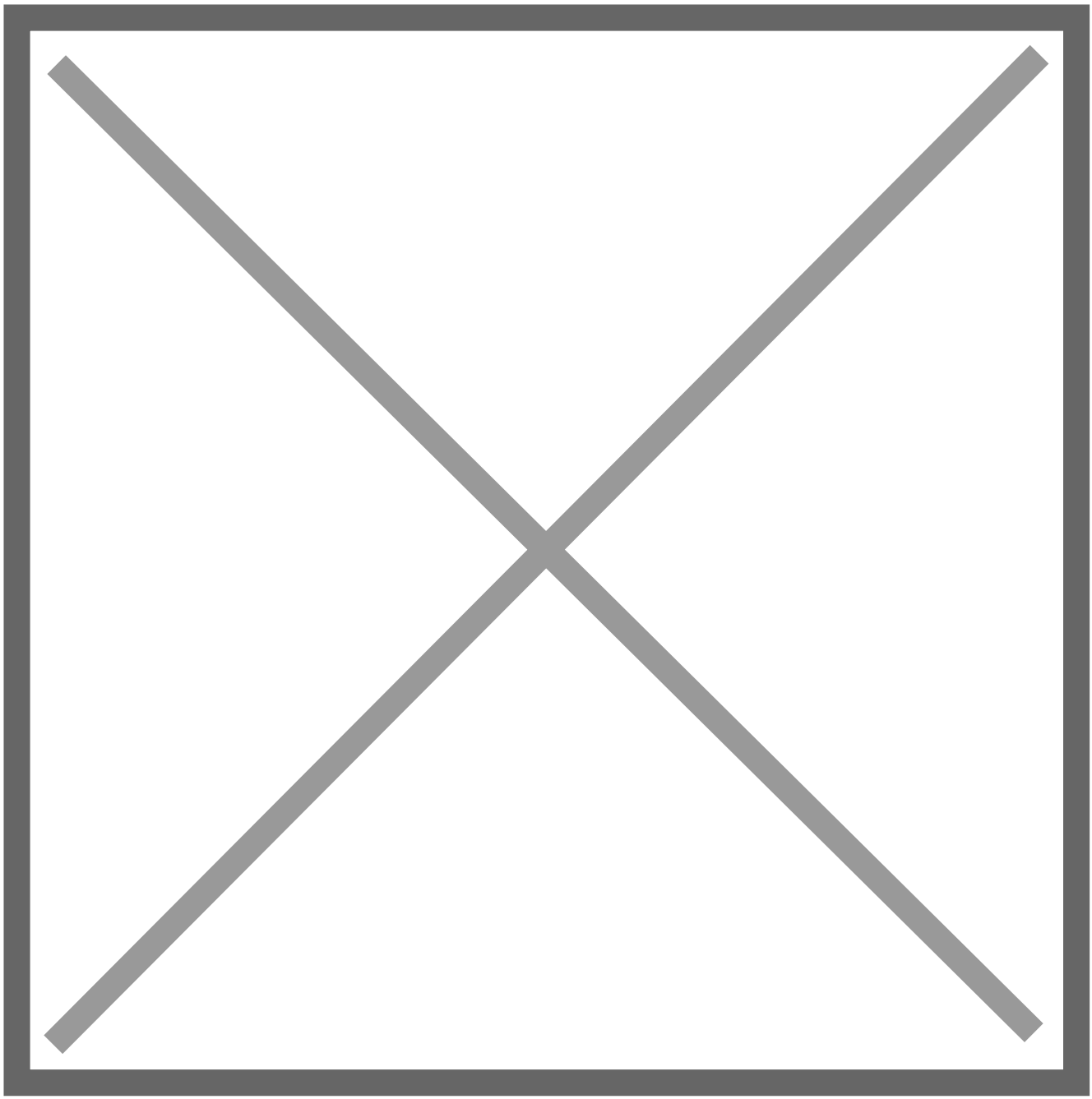
News



Rodrigo Paz of the Christian Democratic Party, a centrist senator and presidential candidate, speaks onstage in La Paz, Bolivia, during a celebration following preliminary results on the day of the presidential runoff election Oct. 19, 2025. Paz defeated former President Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga in a presidential runoff, becoming Bolivia's first conservative leader in decades. (OSV News photo/Reuters/Claudia Morales)



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La Paz, Bolivia — October 22, 2025

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Bolivia has elected Rodrigo Paz as president, picking a centrist politician with a history of amicable church ties.

His victory in the Oct. 19 runoff election ended two decades of governance under the Movement Toward Socialism party, whose founder, former President Evo Morales, clashed with the country's episcopal conference.

Paz, a senator and son of an ex-president, claimed nearly 55% of the vote, besting conservative challenger former President Jorge Quiroga, according to electoral authorities.

The ruling Movement Toward Socialism split prior to the first round of voting in August and was reduced to just two seats in the lower house of Congress from its previous majority status.

Paz, 58, thanked God after winning the runoff, telling supporters it was God "who also gives us the courage to make decisions that affect our country, that lead to moments like these." He added, "God, family, and country are the foundation of the vision we have regarding our commitment to all of Bolivia, to all Bolivians."

The Bolivian bishops' conference expressed satisfaction with the vote, saying in an Oct. 20 statement, "As Bolivians, we experienced a peaceful democratic day yesterday, with strong citizen participation, exercising our right to vote and demonstrating the commitment that unites us as a country, founded on solidarity and peaceful coexistence. This participation expresses everyone's hope: that better days are coming for Bolivia."

They added, "We urge all Bolivian people to commit to building a different future, keeping alive hope and commitment to building better days for Bolivia, respecting each other, and reaffirming dialogue as a path to reunion and development, to move our economy forward."

Paz takes office amid a deep economic crisis in the South American country. Bolivians cannot access dollars, the government has run deep deficits and gasoline lines are long due to shortages. The country's currency, the Boliviano, trades on the black market for double the official exchange rate.

Analysts say voters punished the ruling party for economic mismanagement — a sharp reversal from the early years under Morales, who took office in 2006, and oversaw somewhat cautious fiscal policies despite officially promoting socialism. Morales also nationalized the national gas sector. But the taps are running dry, starving the government of funds, said Rafael Archondo, a Bolivian academic and former editor of Fides, a Jesuit news service.

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"Bolivia used to export gas to Argentina and still does so to Brazil. The gas era is ending. President Paz needs to quickly find an economic solution to this shortage," Archondo told OSV News

"People understand that this crisis started with Evo Morales," Álvaro Zuazo, a Bolivian journalist, told OSV News. The president's unpopularity and that of his party "has everything to do with the economy."

Morales, an Indigenous Aymara and former coca growers' leader, entered office as an ally of leftist regimes in Cuba and Venezuela — and a steadfast foe of the United States, whose drug-eradication policies he opposed. He overwhelmingly won reelection three times, though he ignored a 2016 plebiscite to run that year.

Morales won a fourth term in 2019, but international observers called that election rigged. He stepped down amid violent protests. Bolivia's Catholic bishops served as mediators in the midst of the political crisis at the request of cabinet members of the Movement Toward Socialism party, also known as MAS, the bishops' conference said in a 2021 report on its activities at the time.

A caretaker president, Jeanine Áñez, took office. She proved controversial and the Movement Toward Socialism retook power with President Luis Arce. Morales subsequently accused the bishops of being accomplices in a coup.

The episode showed the tension between the church hierarchy and the ruling party. Bishops expressed some uneasiness with Morales' push to declare Bolivia "plurinational," a concept enshrined in a new 2009 constitution, along with supplanting Catholicism's privileged place with Andean religious customs. Analysts say the church, which has more than 1,500 agreements to provide social services in Bolivia, came to be seen as the opposition — though tensions eased after Pope Francis visited the country in 2015.

Archondo said the church hierarchy "didn't have problems" with Arce, who opted not to run for re-election. With Paz, "(the church) will get along great," Archondo said. "The next president is religious, studied in a Jesuit college and is the son of a former seminarian."