


POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL INSTABILITY IN BOLIVIA: HISTORY AND IMPACTS ON MERCOSUR MEMBERSHIP <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2024.037-133>**Caio Cabral Azevedo¹ and Ronaldo Thomaz Cordeiro Barbosa Filho².****ABSTRACT**

This article correlates the political and constitutional instability of Bolivia and its distant process of accession to MERCOSUR, highlighting the difficulties faced due to internal crises and constitutional reforms. The analysis includes the relationship between political transformations and regional integration, as well as exploring how government challenges have affected the negotiations and ratifications necessary for membership. The methodology adopted is logical-legal, with bibliographic and documentary analysis, addressing the main theoretical landmarks on the Bolivian political history and the process of joining MERCOSUR. The article concludes that Bolivia's accession to MERCOSUR reflects the country's effort to overcome its historical political and constitutional instability, being an opportunity to consolidate democratic institutes and strengthen regional integration and development.

Keywords: Bolivia. MERCOSUR. Regional Integration. Political and Constitutional Instability.

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INTRODUCTION

Bolivia, throughout its recent political history, has faced periods of intense political and constitutional instability, which directly reflected on its process of joining MERCOSUR. The relationship between internal political transformations and regional integration is complex, especially considering that Bolivia has undergone significant constitutional changes and faced governmental challenges that have made it difficult to implement consistent policies. This context of political and constitutional instability was one of the main factors that shaped Bolivia's long and challenging trajectory towards its accession to the MERCOSUR economic bloc.

The main objective of this work is to understand how Bolivia's political and constitutional history has impacted its accession to MERCOSUR, highlighting the elements that made this process prolonged and complex. To this end, the article proposes to analyze how the country's internal crises, combined with frequent constitutional reforms, have affected its ability to establish a stable compromise with the other members of MERCOSUR and have hindered the negotiations and ratifications necessary for full membership. The analysis of the effects of these instabilities offers a crucial perspective to understand the obstacles faced by Bolivia and the mechanisms that, over time, needed to be adjusted to enable its integration into the bloc.

This study adopts a logical-legal methodology, using the collection of bibliographic and documentary data, both primary and secondary, to explore the Bolivian historical analysis and its process of adhesion to the South American economic bloc. In addition, the work is structured in two axes: the first will deal with the troubled political history of Bolivia, highlighting the main moments of instability and their political and institutional implications. The second chapter will be dedicated to joining MERCOSUR, addressing the challenges, negotiations and the impacts of Bolivian instability on the integration process.

The main theoretical frameworks of this study include sources on Bolivia's recent history, such as the G1 and Deutsche Welle (DW) reports on the 2019 crisis, which address political tensions and the coup attempt. Also relevant are the analyses of Agence France-Presse (AFP) on the post-Evo Morales transition period. Authors such as Jorge Ocsa Laime, Magdalena Cajías and Gladstone Leonel da Silva Júnior discuss the constitutional challenges and the evolution of the Bolivian State before and after the promulgation of the 2009 Constitution, which created the Plurinational State, as well as legal sources (such as the publication of constitutions by the Constitutional Court of Bolivia) that analyze the consolidated legal mechanisms of stabilization of the country.

Through a detailed analysis of these two aspects, the article seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the difficulties faced by Bolivia in the search for its integration into MERCOSUR, highlighting how the country's internal context, marked by political and constitutional instability, had a direct impact on its accession process to the regional bloc.

HISTORY OF POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL INSTABILITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BOLIVIA

XIX CENTURY

The book *"Las Constituciones Políticas de Bolivia"*, by the Constitutional Court of Bolivia (2018), teaches that, from the Decree of February 9, 1825 by Antonio José de Sucre (p.10), to the Constitution of 2009 (p.413), Bolivia has experienced a trajectory marked by political instability and constitutional changes. Bolívar, in proposing the first constitution for Bolivia, designed a model based on a strong, centralized government with a lifetime presidency, aimed at avoiding political disputes and maintaining order in a newly independent nation. This model, however, was not implemented according to Bolívar's ideal, and Bolivia soon experienced the difficulties of building a stable democratic order.

As we can see from the analysis of Bolivian constitutions published by the Plurinational Court of Bolivia (2018), over the years, Bolivia has had a total of 20 constitutions (ps. 9, 23, 39, 55, 75, 93, 105, 117, 131, 141, 155, 175, 197, 219, 243, 271, 299, 337, 377, 413), each trying to respond to the challenges of its time. These constitutional changes reflect both the attempt to adapt to economic and social needs and the political instability marked by coups and regional and ethnic tensions. The need to integrate different groups and ensure broader representation, including indigenous populations, was a central issue, especially from the twentieth century onwards.

The 2009 constitution, pushed by the government of Evo Morales, brought a significant break by establishing Bolivia as a Plurinational State, formally recognizing the country's ethnic and cultural diversity. This new constitutional text seeks to overcome the limitations of previous constitutions, promoting the inclusion of indigenous peoples, environmental protection, and gender equality. In addition, it brought innovations in social and political rights, finally seeking to consolidate a more democratic and representative model.

These 20 constitutions reveal Bolivia's long quest for a stable and representative system of government, in a history marked by constant attempts to reconcile cultural diversity, regional autonomy, and national unity. The history of Bolivia's constitutions reflects

a trajectory marked by frequent political changes and the search for stability in a scenario of social and economic tensions.

During the nineteenth century, Bolivia underwent a series of constitutional changes that reflected the political contexts and needs of each historical moment. As pointed out in the work prepared by the Bolivian Plurinational Constitutional Court, constitutions were promulgated in 1831 (p. 39), 1834 (p. 55), 1839 (p. 75), 1843 (p. 93), 1851 (p. 105), 1861 (p. 117), 1868 (p. 131), 1871 (p. 141), 1878 (p. 155) and 1880 (p. 175). Each of them highlighted the constant political transformations of the Andean country.

Shortly after independence, Bolivia adopted its first constitution, inspired by the idealism of Simón Bolívar. This text was based on a centralized and strong government, with a robust executive power, aimed at ensuring national unity. Based on the Political Constitution of the State of 1826, Bolivia's international relations were shaped by principles of sovereignty and independence, enshrined in fundamental provisions. Article 2 (p. 25) reflects an intrinsic commitment to the maintenance of national autonomy and the repudiation of any form of subordination. This provision establishes a legal and political framework that guides the country's actions in the international sphere, supporting its negotiations and external relations.

Between 1836 and 1839, Bolivia faced a period of intense instability due to the War of the Peru-Bolivian Confederation, as Jorge Basadre (1977) explains. Subsequently, the government of José Ballivián Segurola (1841-1847) was marked by significant civil conflicts. According to Víctor Cortés (2022), between 1848 and 1864, Bolivia had six different presidents, in addition to a governing junta in 1861, which reflects the scenario of political instability.

The government of Manuel Mariano Melgarejo Valencia (1864-1871) was a period of extreme controversy. According to the text by Marta Victoriano (2023), Melgarejo was the protagonist of coups d'état and insurgencies, implementing an authoritarian regime that sought to legitimize power and defend the Constitution of 1868 in a revolutionary context. However, as Gladys Murillo points out, his agrarian reforms have negatively affected indigenous communities, generating intense land conflicts with large landowners. Deposed in 1871, Melgarejo was assassinated shortly after, while his successor, Agustín Morales Hernández, also did not remain in power for long, being assassinated in 1872.

In the government of Hilarión Daza Groselle (1876-1879), another constitution was promulgated. During this period, Bolivia went to war against Chile, a conflict that resulted in the loss of its outlet to the sea, as detailed by Patricio Cifuentes (2018). This event

profoundly marked Bolivian history and its territorial disputes, the consequences of which resonate to the present day.

As can be seen from the work of the Plurinational Court, the Constitution of 1880 marked a period of stability in the political history of Bolivia, being the longest lasting in the country, in force until 1938. Elaborated in the context of the War of the Pacific (1879-1874), it sought to consolidate internal order after the territorial loss to Chile. The Constitution of 1880 consolidated a framework of stability in Bolivia, reflecting the challenges of the post-Pacific War period and promoting a balance between institutional order and individual rights.

This balance is visible in legal provisions such as Article 4 (Bolivia, 2018, p. 178), which ensured freedom of movement, work, and expression. By reinforcing the inviolability of the home, Article 12 (Bolivia, 2018, p.179), property, Article 13 (Bolivia, 2018, p.179), and the prohibition of confiscation of property as a political penalty, Article 11 (Bolivia, 2018, p.197), the constitutional text guaranteed protection of civil rights. These legal principles, aligned with a representative democratic model, strengthened governability and increased the social legitimacy of the State, contributing to the durability of the Constitution.

In addition, legal predictability and constitutional reform mechanisms, Articles 132-134 (Bolivia, 2018, p.192), were fundamental for the acceptance of the text over time. The exclusion of the death penalty for political crimes, Article 21 (Bolivia, 2018, p. 179), and the recognition of equal taxation, Article 16 (Bolivia, 2018, p.179), highlight progressive advances that reconciled conservative traits, such as the recognition of the Catholic religion, with modern principles of protection of fundamental rights.

The robustness of the legislative, executive and judicial structure, organized by the Constitution, reinforced political and institutional stability. Thus, the Constitution of 1880 provided a model that not only met the demands of the time, but also offered flexibility to face the challenges of the future, consolidating itself as one of the most resilient texts in Bolivian history. Thus, the Constitution of 1880 represented a milestone in the consolidation of the Bolivian State, providing solid foundations for governability and the construction of republican institutions in the country.

TWENTIETH CENTURY

After more than half a century under the Constitution of 1880, Bolivia once again faced several periods of legal instability throughout the twentieth century, reflecting the intense social conflicts that marked that era. According to Bolivia (2018), Bolivia's 1938

Constitution consolidated important guidelines for the conduct of its international relations, aligning them with the principles of sovereignty, equality, and modernization of the State.

In Article 1 (Bolivia, 2018, p. 200), the text reaffirms Bolivia as a unitarian, free and independent republic, while Article 3 (Bolivia, 2018, p. 200) declares that sovereignty resides in the people, exercised through the constituted powers. This centralized structure allowed the legitimately elected government to conduct foreign policy, reinforcing Bolivia's position as a sovereign actor on the international stage. At the same time, Article 18 (Bolivia, 2018, p. 200) establishes equality between Bolivian citizens and foreigners in access to property, but Article 19 (Bolivia, 2018, p. 200) imposes strategic restrictions on the possession of land by foreigners in border areas, a measure clearly linked to the protection of territorial integrity, especially in the context of the vulnerability exposed during the Chaco War (1932–1935).

These provisions reflect a concern to ensure that foreign policy is conducted on the basis of legality, transparency, and the protection of national interests. At the same time, they show an attempt to balance the need for international cooperation with the preservation of autonomy and internal security. In this way, the 1938 Constitution sought to project a more respectable and modern Bolivia on the international stage, while establishing barriers against external influences that could compromise its sovereignty and territorial integrity, in addition to the fact that, according to Soliz (2014), the so-called "peasant régime" was recognized for the first time, which had recognized the legal existence of the "Bolivian indigenous communities".

Soliz (2014) explains that in the 1940s left-wing political parties began to organize in Bolivia (Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria-PIR, Partido Obrero Revolucionario-POR, and Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario-MNR). Thus, in the 40s of the twentieth century, the idea of modifying the country's agrarian structure began to be debated more vehemently. Gualberto Villarroel López had approved the 1945 constitution with the support of the MNR and had a government marked by authoritarianism and summary execution of opponents, however, explains Fernandez et al (2004), the party's coreligionists abandoned him and the country's macroeconomic conditions deteriorated, in 1946 people invaded the government palace and assassinated the president, defenestrating him dead on a pole in Murillo Square in La Paz.

From 1964 onwards, Bolivia began to be governed by military dictatorial regimes, coincidentally in the same year that Brazil also began to experience the same political situation, it was in this context that, in 1967, Bolivia proclaimed a constitution that would last until the end of the 1990s, being the second longest lasting constitution in the country.

Cajías (2014, p.157-158) explains that the democratization of Bolivia was structured after the 1978 national elections, together with the pressure exerted by the population, especially the strength of the mining workers' union movements (which had their union rights restricted between 1975 and 1978). According to Cajías (2014, p.166), the Bolivian people showed their ability to rearticulate their organizations, from the underground and articulate with the opposition political parties, and managed to reestablish democracy in October 1982.

Bolivia's 1995 Constitution reflected the context of neoliberal structural reforms proposed during the 1990s, marked by an attempt to modernize the state. This modernization sought to strengthen democratic bases, ensure greater administrative decentralization, and promote citizen participation, in line with international recommendations such as those of the IDB. Ocsa (2014, p. 204) explains that the introduction of mechanisms such as the Popular Participation Law and the reforms to the Code of Criminal Procedure aimed to consolidate the rule of law, promoting greater efficiency in public management and transparency in institutions. The creation of the Defensor del Pueblo and the strengthening of instances such as the National Electoral Court are examples of institutional advances that sought to respond to the demands for a more robust and accessible public administration. In this scenario, the municipal elections of 1995 and 1999 stood out as spaces of resistance and political reappropriation, led by social and union organizations, signaling a new dynamic of local governability that tensioned the limits of the political model then in force.

The constituent process that culminated in the 2009 Constitution in Bolivia had its roots in an intense context of social conflicts and popular mobilizations that characterized the previous decades. The water (2000) and gas (2003) "wars", followed by the presidential resignations of Sánchez de Lozada and Carlos Mesa, highlighted a crisis of legitimacy of the current political and economic model. These events strengthened the demands for a Constituent Assembly, originally articulated by social, indigenous and peasant organizations, which became the core of the transformation of the Bolivian state.

The election of Evo Morales, an indigenous union leader, in 2005, was a milestone in this process, allowing the advancement of repressed historical agendas and the convocation of the Constituent Assembly in 2006, supported by Special Convocatory Law No. 3,364. The new Constitution faced significant political resistance, especially from the traditional elite, concentrated in the departments of the "media luna". These groups opposed the plurinationality project and agrarian and economic reforms, adopting sabotage and boycott tactics. Despite the tensions, explains Silva Júnior (2015, p. 174-176), the MAS-IPSP obtained a parliamentary majority in the Assembly, which allowed for substantial

advances, such as the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and the redefinition of the State as plurinational.

However, negotiations with the opposition resulted in concessions, such as the limitation of indigenous community justice and adjustments to agrarian reform, evidencing the hybrid nature of the final text. In February 2009, it began to have its current Constitution with popular support, consolidating the Plurinational State of Bolivia as a milestone in the "new Latin American constitutionalism", although permeated by challenges and compromises.

Let us look at the speech of Evo Morales Ayma (2009, p.1) in the preamble of the Constitution:

In time immemorial, mountains were erected, rivers were moved, lakes were formed. Our Amazon, our Chaco, our altiplano and our plains and valleys were covered with greenery and flowers. We populated this sacred Mother Earth with different faces, and since then we have understood the current plurality of all things and our diversity as beings and cultures. This is how we formed our peoples, and we never understood racism until we suffered it from the disastrous times of the colony. The Bolivian people, of plural composition, from the depths of history, inspired by the struggles of the past, by the indigenous anti-colonial uprising, by independence, by the popular liberation struggles, by the indigenous, social and trade union marches, by the water and October wars, by the struggles for land and territory, and by the memory of our martyrs, we built a new State. A State based on respect and equality among all, with principles of sovereignty, dignity, complementarity, solidarity, harmony and equity in the distribution and redistribution of the social product, where the search for living well predominates; with respect for the economic, social, legal, political and cultural plurality of the inhabitants of this land; in collective coexistence with access to water, work, education, health and housing for all. We leave the colonial, republican and neoliberal state in the past. We take on the historic challenge of collectively building the Unitary Social State of Plurinational Community Law, which integrates and articulates the purposes of advancing towards a democratic, productive, peace-inspiring Bolivia, committed to integral development and the self-determination of peoples. We, women and men, through the Constituent Assembly and with the original power of the people, express our commitment to the unity and integrity of the country. Fulfilling the mandate of our peoples, with the strength of our Pachamama and thanks to God, we refounded Bolivia. Honor and glory to the martyrs of the constituent and liberating feat, who have made this new history possible.

CONTEXT AFTER THE 2009 CONSTITUTION AND POLITICAL CRISES IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20S OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Promoted by the government of Evo Morales, the 2009 constitution is the most recent and represents a break with the previous model, establishing Bolivia as a "Plurinational State". This Bolivian constitutional history shows a country in search of a political system that caters to ethnic and cultural diversity, while stabilizing democratic institutions. The 2009 constitution remains in force, but political and social challenges keep the country in constant debate about the need for adjustments and reforms.

In 2019, according to an article published in G1 (2019), then-President Evo Morales sought a controversial fourth term. Accusations of electoral fraud sparked massive protests, leading to his resignation and the installation of an interim government, under the presidency of Jeanine Añez. Morales' party, the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), had maintained that the event was a coup d'état. Currently, Añez is in prison accused of terrorism and criminal association, according to a report by Santiago (2024).

A report by Deutsche Welle (2024) explains that in the 2020 elections, Luís Arce, former Minister of Economy and ally of Morales, was elected president, returning the MAS party to power. On June 26, 2024, General Juan José Zúñiga led an attempted military coup, mobilizing troops and armored vehicles in La Paz, he had attempted to take the Quemado Palace in Murillom Square, a place that witnessed other coup attempts, as evidenced in this article. The action was quickly contained, and Zúñiga was arrested. This event highlighted the deep political divisions in the country.

As reported by Mayara Paixão (2024), Bolivia faces significant challenges, including a declining economy, low international reserves, and internal political tensions. The split within the MAS between factions loyal to Arce and Morales further complicates the political landscape, with the 2025 presidential elections approaching. Bolivia faces protests led by Morales supporters, who accused Arce's government of corruption and economic mismanagement. Agence France-Presse (2024) reported that in November 2024, protesters occupied military barracks and held soldiers hostage, intensifying political instability.

BOLIVIA'S ACCESSION TO MERCOSUR IN THE FACE OF POLITICAL-CONSTITUTIONAL INSTABILITY

Bolivia's long and complex process of joining MERCOSUR represents a significant milestone for Latin American integration. This decision reflects the country's quest to strengthen its relations with its neighbors and expand its growth opportunities through greater regional cooperation and coordination. In addition, joining the bloc represents an attempt to overcome the internal crises that have marked Bolivia's political and economic trajectory, while aiming to restore international confidence in the country.

The history of the Republic of Bolivia's accession to MERCOSUR dates back to December 21, 2006, when, through its representative, Evo Morales Ayma, Bolivia formalized its application to join the economic bloc during the MERCOSUR Presidents Summit, held in Córdoba, Argentina (SEGGATO, 2024). This event initiated the procedures provided for in Decision No. 28/05 of the Common Market Council (CMC).

As stipulated in Decision No. 28/05, which regulates the procedures for the accession of new members, once the request to the CMC has been formalized, through the *acting Pro Tempore* Presidency, it is up to the CMC to determine the creation of an *ad hoc group*. This group, as established by the decision, would have an initial period of 180 days, extendable for an equal period, to analyze the conditions of the application for adhesion.

After the formalization of the application for accession to the bloc by Bolivia, through the *Pro Tempore* Presidency of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay, on January 18, 2007, during the 32nd Ordinary Meeting of the CMC, the creation of an *ad hoc group* for the analysis of the incorporation of Bolivia as a State Party to MERCOSUR was approved. The first meeting of this group took place between March 26 and 27, 2007, initiating a series of discussions and analyses on the terms and conditions of Bolivia's accession.

From this phase, the *ad hoc group* began to evaluate the impact of Bolivia's accession in various aspects, such as trade, economic policies and social policies of MERCOSUR. During this period, the study and preparation of the Accession Protocol began, a legal document that formalizes the conditions for the integration of a State into MERCOSUR. The protocol aims to establish a series of provisions, ranging from the obligations of the requesting State in relation to the bloc's trade and political rules, to responsibilities in intra-bloc trade and issues of political and social cooperation.

Bolivia's accession process advanced in a more concrete way from that moment on, with the start of negotiations and the preparation for the country's full integration into MERCOSUR. During 2010 and 2011, the *ad hoc group* drafted the Protocol of Accession, detailing the specific conditions for Bolivia's integration into MERCOSUR, including the adoption of the bloc's trade and political norms, such as the Common External Tariff (CET), the MERCOSUR Common Nomenclature (NCM) and the MERCOSUR foreign policy.

However, as detailed in the previous chapter, Bolivia's political instability directly impacted this process. The constant changes of government, internal crises and popular protests have slowed down the continuity of the integration process. These crises have affected the Bolivian government's ability to engage in dialogue effectively and have generated uncertainty about the country's commitment to the other MERCOSUR members.

Another factor that hindered the process was the constant alteration of the Bolivian Constitution, which delayed the creation of a stable political environment, essential for the celebration and ratification of international agreements, and sometimes paralyzed the dialogue in search of an internal political consensus, necessary for the ratification of the agreements. This scenario resulted in legal uncertainty and institutional weakness, reflecting negatively on the country's accession process to the economic bloc.

Bolivia's accession process gained new momentum in 2012 with the political approval of accession during the Mendoza Summit in Argentina, where Decision No. 28/12 was adopted, formalizing the political will of the member countries to accept Bolivia as a full member. However, although there was a symbolic advance with Decision No. 28/12, the formal ratification of Bolivia as a member of MERCOSUR would require a series of additional steps, such as the signing of the Protocol of Accession and the conclusion of negotiations with the bloc's member countries.

It was only on July 7, 2015, during the MERCOSUR Summit in Brasilia, Brazil, that Bolivia's Accession Protocol was finally signed. This framework detailed the country's obligations in relation to the internalization and compliance with the MERCOSUR normative acquis, including commercial, political, economic and social integration standards, as well as commitments aimed at regional cooperation. This step, however, did not represent the end of the accession process. After the signing of the protocol in 2015, the MERCOSUR States Parties, as well as Bolivia, must complete the legislative ratification of the Accession Protocol.

After signing the Accession Protocol, the National Congress of Brazil, following the due constitutional rite, according to the Federal Constitution of 1988, ratified the Protocol through Legislative Decree No. 127, of 2022. Argentina, in turn, also ratified Bolivia's Accession Protocol in 2022, through a national law approved by the Argentine National Congress. Paraguay ratified the Protocol quickly, in 2022, through a resolution of the Paraguayan National Congress. Finally, Uruguay ratified the Protocol in 2021 through a Resolution of the Uruguayan Senate.

Venezuela, suspended from MERCOSUR in 2016 after a series of internal political and institutional issues, as well as after going through a period of growing political instability and tensions with the other members of the bloc, along the lines of the Ushuaia Protocol, which governs the democratic clause of MERCOSUR, had its vote withdrawn during Bolivia's accession negotiations. being prohibited from exercising any influence on the decisions of the bloc while the suspension lasts.

Currently, Bolivia has managed to become a full member of MERCOSUR, after a long and challenging process that lasted more than 15 years, with formal membership completed in 2015 and final ratification of the protocols by the bloc's members taking place in 2024. From its accession, Bolivia has a period of up to 10 years to adapt its regulatory framework to MERCOSUR norms and treaties, including the implementation of commercial, economic and social policies compatible with the bloc's objectives.

According to the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BRASIL, 2024):

The Brazilian government has learned, with satisfaction, of the approval, today, by the Bolivian Senate, unanimously, of the Protocol of Accession of Bolivia to MERCOSUR. With the conclusion of the process within the Legislature, the regulation, which had been approved by the country's Chamber of Deputies on June 14, will proceed to presidential sanction. Bolivia's accession had already been ratified by Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil. Once ratified by Bolivia, the instrument will enter into force in 30 days, and the country will have a period of up to four years to incorporate the MERCOSUR normative acquis.

The full incorporation of Bolivia into the bloc will open new opportunities for increased trade and investment, as well as possibilities for deepening cooperation on social issues for the five countries involved, contributing to the economic growth and prosperity of MERCOSUR members.

However, despite this achievement, Bolivia's internal challenges, such as political instability, frequent constitutional reforms, and social crises, remain present (G1, *on-line*, 2019). These factors still raise doubts about the country's ability to consolidate itself as a strategic and effective member of MERCOSUR. The complexity of Bolivia's internal scenario raises questions about the sustainability of its commitment to the bloc and the effectiveness of integration policies in the future.

In the words of Seggano (*online*):

Political instability is another challenge to be overcome. Bolivia has a history of coups d'état and political turmoil. The country has already had a president lynched in the street and the presidential palace itself set on fire. For this reason, the building where Luis Arce dispatches is called Palácio Queimado. This history of instability scares away investors and hinders negotiations and works. In this regard, it is up to the Bolivian governments to respect democratic rules and to the neighbors to ensure their compliance in an incisive way, without depending on the ideology of the government of the day.

However, the same author reinforces that, if the challenges are overcome, Bolivia's entry into MERCOSUR can mean the strengthening of the country's democratic institutions, being an important source of support for MERCOSUR to overcome its own internal crises and prosper. In the words of Seggano (2024, *online*): "[...] The potentialities exist and are many. However, for them to materialize, it will depend a lot on the political will of the States that are part of the Southern Common Market. South American integration would have much to celebrate if these challenges are overcome."

Thus, although the accession process has been long and challenging, Bolivia now finds itself in a strategic position to take advantage of closer integration with its neighbors, contributing to a more promising future, both for the country and for the entire region.

CONCLUSION

Bolivia's accession to MERCOSUR, although historic and significant for regional integration, was marked by a long and troubled process, a reflection of the country's internal political and constitutional crises. Since the formal application for membership in 2006,



Bolivia has faced government instability, frequent changes of presidents, and popular protests, factors that have slowed negotiations and made it difficult to build a stable political environment, essential for the formalization of membership.

Despite these difficulties, the country finally managed to complete the process of joining MERCOSU in 2024, with the completion of internal ratifications of the Protocol of Accession. However, political instability has persisted, with constant constitutional reforms and internal crises that continue to challenge Bolivia's ability to consolidate a lasting commitment to MERCOSUR. This unpredictable political scenario raises doubts about the effectiveness of integration and the sustainability of future agreements within the bloc.

If Bolivia succeeds in overcoming these internal challenges, MERCOSUR membership could represent a crucial opportunity to strengthen its democratic institutions and promote more robust economic growth. Integration with its neighbors can be the key to political stability and the creation of an environment more conducive to regional development, benefiting not only Bolivia, but the entire MERCOSUR bloc.

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