



In Bolivia, Canada is supporting an initiative to provide technical assistance and training, as well as communications strategies and tools, to the country's regional legislative assemblies (RLAs), says Marcelo Villafani, a program officer for International IDEA, an intergovernmental organization based in Sweden focused on democracy and electoral assistance.

Of the 267 people elected in the first regional elections in 2010, just 4 percent had previously held a legislative position, he says. Some 53 percent do not have a high-school diploma, and 20 percent did not finish elementary school.

Villafani says that if the RLAs are a success, they will provide the regions with more autonomy, some control over natural resources and the ability to represent citizens. "If the government is closer to the people, it will be able to react more rapidly and do the kinds of things that people in these regions need," he adds.

Such autonomy is also reflected in Canada's efforts in the AUDG, says Bernardo Peredo, an LES who is the AUDG's political analyst in La Paz. Peredo, who has a PhD in political ecology and governance from Oxford University, says that understanding the Andean region's complexities is important for Canada.



Top left: Citizens in Bogotá examine an outdoor exhibition sponsored by the Andean Unit for Democratic Governance, featuring photos of members of the Colombian Senate, as well as quotes reflecting their views on democracy.  
photo: Robert Max Steenkist

Above: Students attend a concert in front of the National Assembly in Quito to launch a new youth website.  
photo: Roberto Noriego

"It's not black or white, it has many, many shades of grey, and to see those shades of grey is important," he says, adding that supporting democratic institutions such as Bolivia's new RLAs is key in poverty alleviation, economic development and resource management. "We are able to promote democracy at a closer level to the citizens."