



Bolivia: Presidential Resignation and Aftermath

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On November 10, 2019, Bolivia's Evo Morales of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party [resigned](#) his presidency and sought asylum in Mexico. He ultimately received refugee status in Argentina. Bolivia's military suggested Morales consider resigning to prevent violence after weeks of protests alleging fraud in the October 20, 2019, election. Three individuals in line to succeed Morales (the vice president and the presidents of the senate and the chamber of deputies) also resigned. Opposition Senator Jeanine Añez, formerly second vice president of the senate, declared herself senate president and then interim president on November 12. Bolivia's constitutional court [recognized](#) her succession. Following protests and state violence, the MAS-led Congress unanimously approved an electoral [law](#) to annul the October elections and select a new electoral tribunal. On January 3, 2020, the tribunal [announced](#) those elections are scheduled for May 3, 2020.

The Trump Administration and Congress have expressed concerns regarding irregularities and manipulation in Bolivia's election and violence following the election and Morales's resignation. They support efforts to ensure the May elections are free and fair.

October Elections Annulled

Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, [transformed Bolivia](#), but [observers](#) criticized his effort to remain in office beyond constitutionally mandated term limits (he won elections in 2006, 2009, and 2014). In 2017, Bolivia's Constitutional Tribunal removed limits on reelection established in the 2009 constitution, overruling a 2016 referendum in which voters rejected a constitutional change to allow Morales to serve another term.

In January 2019, Morales began campaigning for a fourth term. Opposition candidates included former President Carlos Mesa (2003-2005), Senator Oscar Ortiz, and evangelical minister Chi Hyun Chung.

[Allegations of fraud](#) marred Bolivia's October 2019 election. Morales needed to win by a 10-point margin to avoid a runoff. The country's electoral agency said Morales won narrowly over Mesa, but Mesa rejected that result. Observers from the Organization of American States (OAS) described [irregularities](#) in the process. Mesa called for protesters to demand a new election, while Luis Camacho, head of a civic committee from Santa Cruz, led national protests for Morales's resignation. On October 30, the Morales government agreed to have the OAS audit the election results and to convene a runoff election if recommended. Nevertheless, protests continued.

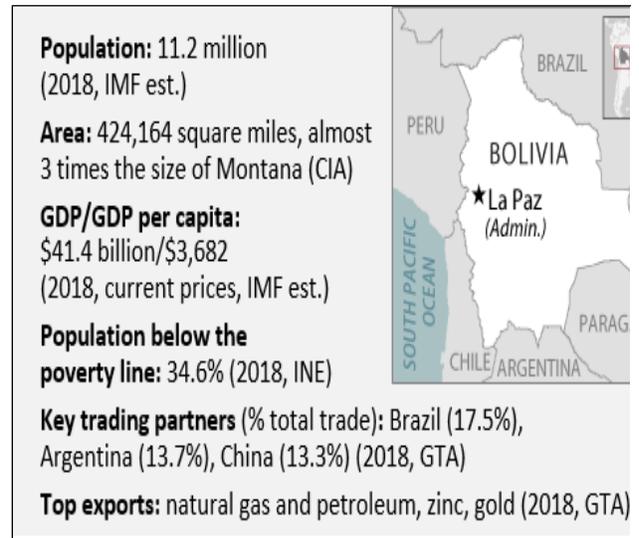
On November 10, 2019, the OAS issued [preliminary findings](#) suggesting serious manipulation of results and found enough irregularities to merit a new election. Morales agreed to hold new elections, but the opposition rejected his offer. Morales resigned after police refused to stop protesters, ministers resigned, and civic organizations, unions, and the military urged him to step down. The aforementioned November 23, 2019, electoral law annulled the October 20 presidential (and legislative) elections and reimposed term limits. The final OAS election [audit report](#) found "serious irregularities" and "intentional manipulation" that made the results impossible to validate.

Interim Government and 2020 Elections

According to Bolivia's constitution, the interim government has a mandate to convene new elections. Some observers have criticized Interim President Añez, formerly a little-known opposition senator, for exceeding that mandate. Añez's past anti-indigenous political rhetoric and conservative cabinet, with only one indigenous member, [raised concerns](#) among some of Bolivia's indigenous population, which became empowered under Morales. Añez also reversed several MAS foreign policy stances. She expelled Cuban officials, recognized Interim Venezuelan President Juan Guaidó, and got into a [diplomatic row](#) with Spain and Mexico regarding their diplomatic protection of former MAS officials.

The MAS-led Congress initially refused to accept Añez's government, and many MAS supporters protested. Añez issued a [decree](#) giving the military authority to participate in crowd-control efforts and immunity from certain prosecutions while doing so, as long as it respected human rights. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights issued a [report](#) documenting 36 deaths and 400 injuries that occurred from November 8 to November 27, 2019, including two massacres involving state forces. The interim government [rejected](#) those findings, accusing "subversives" of orchestrating the protests. Protests died down after passage of the electoral law and Añez's November 24 revocation of the military decree, but they could escalate again, as prosecutors have issued an [arrest warrant](#) for Morales on charges of terrorism and sedition.

Figure I. Bolivia at a Glance



Sources: CRS Graphics, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas* (INE), Global Trade Atlas (GTA).

Observers praised the November election law as a step toward new elections. A new electoral tribunal has been appointed and announced that the first round election will occur on May 3. A second-round presidential contest would occur, if needed, on June 14. Añez and Morales are prohibited from running. Candidates include Carlos Mesa and [Luis Camacho](#). The MAS candidate will be named soon. Bolivia's interim government has requested significant election-related assistance.

U.S. Concerns

The United States remains concerned about the political volatility in Bolivia, but its role in supporting a return to democracy may be limited. Bolivia-U.S. relations were tense following the 2008 ousting of the U.S. ambassador, and bilateral assistance to the country ended in 2013.

U.S. statements have sometimes mirrored those of the OAS General Secretariat and the European Union (the main donor in Bolivia) but also have praised the Añez government, which the U.S. [recognizes](#), for expelling Cuban officials and recognizing Venezuela's Guaidó government. The [State Department](#) supported the OAS election observation and audit efforts. The United States and 25 other OAS countries issued a November [statement](#) rejecting violence and calling for new elections as soon as possible. A December 9 [statement](#) by Secretary of State Pompeo also called for a focus on convening new elections. Regional consensus has eroded over the Añez government's crackdown on protesters and efforts to punish Morales and his allies. On December 18, 2019, the OAS Permanent Council narrowly approved a resolution rejecting "racist violence" in Bolivia.

The situation in Bolivia has generated some concern in Congress. S.Res. 447, reported by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in December 2019, supports the prompt convening of new elections.

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