

Bolivia

RED ALERT | N°6



What Is Happening in Bolivia Regarding the 3 May Elections?

- On 10 November 2019, a coup d'état took place in Bolivia. The commander-in-chief of the Bolivian Armed Forces asked President Evo Morales to resign. The police had already mutinied, and society had already been destabilised – this had been triggered by a presidential election whose results had not been recognised by the opposition and whose results had been suspiciously discredited by the Organisation of American States (OAS). Two days after Morales resigned, a largely unheard-of opposition politician, Jeanine Áñez, declared herself to be the interim president without the necessary quorum in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, where Morales' party, the Movement to Socialism (MAS) holds the majority of the seats.
- The new government said that it would only remain until elections could be held. However, from the inauguration of Áñez, the government has prosecuted a policy of repression against the leaders and militants of MAS and against social movements (36 people have died), and it has implemented political and economic policy changes that are inspired by the neoliberal agenda driven by the United States government. The interim government has a racist, patriarchal, and fundamentalist character, as expressed through symbolic and

reactionary acts of violence, such as the denigration of the Wiphala (a flag that represents the diversity of the indigenous people and nations of Bolivia).

- In January 2020, the government announced that the presidential and legislative elections will be held on 3 May. The election process began under conditions of severely restricted democratic freedom; by January's end, the interim government had militarised the country's main cities to prevent any possible demonstrations. It has continued to harass and persecute members of the MAS government who have sought asylum in foreign embassies for fear of their lives. The interim government has closed more than fifty radio stations; it has accused them of sedition and of incitement to violence for having broadcast stories critical of the interim government.
- A number of coalitions of political parties have registered tickets for the presidential election. The candidates for MAS are Luis Arce Catacora (President) and David Choquehuanca Céspedes (Vice President). Catacora was the Minister of Economy and Public Finance under Morales and the architect of the administration's economic success. Céspedes was the Foreign Minister in that government. He managed Bolivia's policy of international sovereignty and is an important person to Bolivia's indigenous and peasant movements. Early polls show that the MAS ticket is in first place.
- In the first days of February, one of Morales' two attorney was detained. The government sought to arrest MAS's attorney, who was in the midst of registering candidates for the May elections. Threats began to mount against Luis Arce Catacora, the presidential candidate of MAS, as he returned to Bolivia, including the possibility of his arrest. Parts of the country with the deepest support for MAS face repression and threats that their right to vote might be withdrawn.
- The interim president – Áñez – announced that she will be a candidate for the presidency without leaving her current position; this is in contradiction to her earlier statements. The other candidates who

supported the coup d'état nonetheless criticised her move, which validates the coup character of this government and its officials.

- The international community must be seized of the danger that the interim government will ban MAS, commit fraud, and destroy the possibility of democracy in Bolivia.

Why the Coup and Why US Intervention in Bolivia?

- Bolivia has the largest known lithium reserves in the world (with the potential to produce 20% of global lithium). Lithium is a central component for batteries, which are used in electric cars, laptops, watches, and cell phones, as well as for the storage of renewable energy. The largest deposit of lithium in Bolivia is in the Uyuni salt flats in the department of Potosí, where Morales' administration had planned to extract it through the state-owned company.
- Bolivia has considerable hydrocarbon reserves – especially natural gas – which it supplies to Brazil and Argentina. When Morales took office, an early measure was to nationalise these resources and develop state control over them. A substantial part of the hydrocarbon reserves is located in Santa Cruz, in Bolivia's eastern region. This is also the home of its agribusiness, especially soy. The government of Santa Cruz and its civic committee have been the base of the opposition to Morales from the very beginning and played a central role in the social destabilisation that led to the coup.
- Morales won the 2005 election with more than 50% of the vote. In his first term (2006-2010), his MAS-led administration nationalised hydrocarbon production and other strategic parts of the economy; it pushed for land reform; and it reformed the constitution through a Constituent Assembly process, which became the foundation for the formation of Bolivia as a Plurinational State. Morales, from 2006, drove a policy to substantially improve all social indicators; his

government was able to reduce poverty (38.2% to 15.2%), eradicate illiteracy, and improve hygiene as well as life expectancy (by 9 years).

- Despite being a majority indigenous country, Bolivia has been governed by a caste that is predominantly made up of groups who consider themselves to be white. Indigenous people have long suffered from subjugation, racism, and discrimination in political, economic, and social spheres at the hands of this governing caste. Morales' government represented a complete shift in the social sense. It forcefully combatted the violence of racism and the xenophobic discourse about indigenous peoples and cultures; this was a government committed to ending the structure and culture of colonial domination. The symbols that define the interim government, on the other hand, are marked by racial hatred and fascism; this is what has sustained them in their fiercely racist attacks against MAS.
- The US government hastily recognised and warmly welcomed Añez into the diplomatic world; it immediately pressured the Mexican government, and then later the Argentinian government, to deny asylum requests from members of MAS and from Morales' administration. It is now clear that the US government participated in the preparation and the execution of the coup against Morales. There was an immediate dislike by the US of Morales for his policy of economic resource nationalism, for his expulsion of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) from Bolivia, for his suspension of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) military eradication programme against coca, and for his denunciations in international forums of the US policy of economic, military, and political intervention.



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