



# 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 had 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, 2019. Bolivia's constitutional court [recognized](#) her succession. After a period of protests and state violence, the MAS-led Congress unanimously approved a [law](#) to annul the October elections, select a new electoral tribunal, and have that tribunal convene new elections.

The Trump Administration and Congress have expressed concerns regarding irregularities and manipulation in Bolivia's election, violence following the election and Morales's resignation, and the expectation for the interim government to convene free and fair elections as soon as possible.

## October Elections Annulled

Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, [transformed Bolivia](#), but many [observers](#) expressed concerns as he sought 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. The decision overruled a 2016 referendum in which voters rejected a constitutional change to allow Morales to serve another term.

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In January 2019, Morales began campaigning for a fourth term. Opposition candidates included former President Carlos Mesa (2003-2005); Senator Oscar Ortiz; and Chi Hyun Chung, an evangelical minister. Morales needed to win by a 10-point margin in the first round to avoid a second-round runoff.

[Allegations of fraud](#) marred Bolivia's first-round election in October 2019. The country's electoral agency said Morales won a narrow victory 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 a nationwide push 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 that enough irregularities occurred to merit a new election. Morales agreed to hold new elections, but the opposition rejected his offer. Morales resigned after police refused to put down protesters; ministers resigned; and civic organizations, unions, and the military urged him to step down. A November 23, 2019, electoral law annulled the October 20 presidential (and legislative) elections and reimposed term limits that prohibit Morales from running in 2020. The final OAS election [audit report](#) found "serious irregularities" and "intentional manipulation" that made the results impossible to validate.

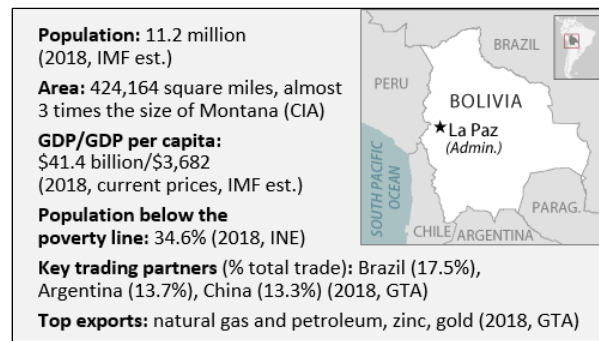
## Interim Government and 2020 Elections

According to the Bolivian 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, which has 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 (including doctors), recognized Interim President Juan Guaidó of Venezuela, and sent an ambassador to the United States.

The MAS-led Congress initially refused to accept Añez's government, and many MAS supporters protested. Añez issued a [decree](#) giving the military permission to participate in crowd-control efforts and immunity from certain prosecutions for doing so, as long as it used only proportional force and 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 November 23 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.

Observers praised the November election law as a step toward new elections. A new electoral tribunal is in the process of being appointed. The electoral body has 120 days to convene a first-round election, followed by a second round if necessary. Likely candidates include Carlos Mesa and [Luis Camacho](#), but it

**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).

remains unclear who will stand for the MAS. 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, after Bolivia expelled a U.S. Agency for International Development mission.

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 [Department of State](#) supported the OAS election observation and audit efforts. The United States and 25 other countries issued a November [statement](#) to the OAS 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 somewhat 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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