

Election threats for Bolivia

written by Marco Teruggi
October 5, 2020



MAS candidate Luis Arce.

The presidential elections in Bolivia are scheduled for October 18. With only a few weeks to go, and with polls showing disputed results in favor of MAS candidate Luis Arce, there are statements from Bolivia and the United States that are threatening

the race.

One message drew attention a few weeks before the October 18 presidential elections in Bolivia: Luis Almagro, secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS), meeting in Washington with Arturo Murillo, Bolivia's government minister, wrote on his Twitter account his concern about possible election fraud.

Yesterday I met with @MindeGovernment of #Bolivia @ArturoMurilloS. He conveyed to me his concern about possible further fraud in #EleccionesGenerales2020. We committed to maximum efforts xa to strengthen the Electoral Mission of #OEA inBolivia and xa to ensure the will of the people
pic.twitter.com/Ek0J0ZtoVX

- Luis Almagro (@Almagro_OEA2015) September 30, 2020

Ayer me reuní con [@MindeGobierno](#) de [#Bolivia](#) [@ArturoMurilloS](#). Me transmitió su preocupación sobre posibilidad de nuevo fraude en [#EleccionesGenerales2020](#). Nos comprometimos a máximos esfuerzos xa fortalecer la Misión Electoral de [#OEAenBolivia](#) y xa asegurar la voluntad del pueblo [pic.twitter.com/Ek0J0ZtoVX](#)

— Luis Almagro (@Almagro_OEA2015) [September 30, 2020](#)

The message was published as part of Murillo's trip to the United States, where it had little impact: a photo with Almagro, and a meeting with the State Department and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). His visit was "official," he said, in response to questions about his sudden departure from the country.

Both men have been key in the coup events. Almagro played a central role from the OAS, both in the initial point of the coup escalation by questioning the election results of October 20, and in accelerating the fall of Morales on November 10 by presenting the audit report in advance.

This political role of the OAS, as well as the lack of veracity of its analysis of the alleged fraud, was denounced by several studies. However, a year later, the OAS has returned to Bolivia with the same head of the Electoral Observation Mission as last year: Manuel González, former foreign minister of Costa Rica.

As for Murillo, he has been one of the main leaders of the policy of threats and persecutions from the de facto government. Appointed from the beginning as head of the government ministry, he has remained in a cabinet where only seven of the 20 ministers of the original team are left.

His internal influence has been recently denounced by Óscar Ortiz, Minister of Economy and Public Finances who was dismissed on September 29th: “President Añez has handed over the future of the government and the country to Minister Murillo, who is a person who does not have the capacity, does not have the necessary serenity to be able to solve the problems as it should be, which is to seek solutions within the framework of the Constitution and the laws”.

Why did Murillo and Almagro begin to discuss fraud when they had control of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) and the OAS Mission? “Hopefully they are not receiving instructions not to carry out the elections or finally, as happened in Honduras, to commit electoral fraud,” denounced Luis Arce, candidate for president for the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS).

The declaration of Almagro together with Murillo, in the final stretch of the elections, raised alarms about the installation and preparation of a possible scenario: the denunciation of fraud on election day in order not to recognize a possible victory in the first round for Arce.

Threats

These are not the only threats to the electoral process. The possibility of the

suspension of the legal status of MAS by the Plurinational Constitutional Court (TCP) is still in force. The resolution of the TCP should be after the 18th, according to Sergio Choque, a MAS deputy and president of the Chamber of Deputies, but the possibility still remains.

On the other hand, there have been aggressions against a campaign caravan of the MAS in the department of Santa Cruz, a region where Fernando Camacho, central leader during the escalation of the coup d'état, currently a candidate for president, has greater strength.

We denounce to the international community that violent groups financed by the extreme right in the country are attempting to free our sisters and brothers in #Montero and #Warnes, and are once again driving a situation of total intolerance in #Bolivia. pic.twitter.com/60sWkBd7Mt

- Luis Arce Catacora (Lucho Arce) (@LuchoXBolivia) September 24, 2020

[Hilo] Denunciamos ante la Comunidad Internacional, que grupos violentos financiados por la derecha extrema del país, atentan contra la libertad de nuestras hermanas y hermanos en [#Montero](#) y [#Warnes](#), e impulsan nuevamente a una coyuntura de intolerancia total en [#Bolivia](#). pic.twitter.com/60sWkBd7Mt

— Luis Arce Catacora (Lucho Arce) (@LuchoXBolivia) [September 24, 2020](#)

Both Camacho and Murillo have been singled out for their links to armed, paramilitary organizations, such as the Unión Juvenil Cruceñista, and the Resistencia Cochala, which were deployed during the coup in Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, and La Paz, and in August against mobilizations and blockades by social movements demanding that election dates not be postponed.

The possibility of a scenario of violence has been anticipated in these days by the de

facto government. Añez, speaking on CNN, affirmed that if Arce loses the elections “he will not recognize the result and will want to set the country on fire”. Murillo, for his part, affirmed that MAS has “firearms” and that there could be “blood on October 18th”.

Murillo also added that during his trip to the United States he addressed “quite delicate issues that have to do with the security of the State, referring to the threats before the elections,” for which “the United States can help in several ways”.

Accusing MAS of violence is a narrative strategy that was used from the beginning of the coup: under this argument there were persecutions, criminalization of leaders – like Evo Morales himself – organizations and protests. It occurs at a critical point in this case, when political power is at stake.

“Hopefully Murillo is not receiving instructions to convulse the country,” said Arce. Could the de facto government unleash episodes of violence, attribute them to MAS and then use them as a justification to take exceptional measures that could affect the electoral contest? This is the question and threat that is gaining strength as the elections approach.

The objective would be to prevent a return of MAS to government in Bolivia, something that is largely tied to the possibility of Arce winning on October 18 with more than 40% and 10 points difference over the next candidate, thus avoiding a second round.

First and second round

Arce led all the polls since he was presented as a candidate. One of the reasons for this was the division of the right-wing actors who were part of the coup d'état in different roles: Fernando Camacho, Jorge Quiroga, Carlos Mesa and Jeanine Añez.

These actors, united in October and November around the goal of overthrowing Evo,

became divided again once the de facto government had managed to settle down, and, above all, when Añez decided to announce her presidential candidacy, something that was not part of the internal agreement and provoked confrontations.

The MAS, in contrast to that fragmentation, managed to articulate itself around the binomial of Arce and David Choquehuanca, with the support of the social, indigenous, and peasant movements and the Bolivian Workers' Central (COB).

The inability of the right-wing candidates to build a common platform was one of the reasons for the electoral postponements from May 3 to August 2, then to September 6, and finally to October 18. This situation of fragmentation brought about the announcement by Añez on September 18 not to run as a candidate and thus avoid a greater dispersion of the vote.

Her resignation from the candidacy occurred two days after the publication of the Ciesmori poll numbers that showed a victory for the MAS in the first round. Her withdrawal brought the expected result: a new poll by the same company, revealed on October 1st, Arce would no longer win in the first round, but would go to a second round against Mesa. As for Camacho, he would be third, and Quiroga, far behind, would be fifth.

A survey by the Latin American Strategic Center for Geopolitics (CELAG) on October 2, however, showed that Arce, with a small difference, would win in the first round, with 44.4% of the votes against 34.0% for Mesa. In contrast, in the case of a second round, the survey indicates that the winner would be Mesa, by a margin of two points.

The challenge to avoid the return of the MAS to the presidency is therefore centered on reaching the second round, scheduled for November 29. That possibility will be played, according to the polls, by a small margin of votes.

The power

The de facto government confronted a paradox: it lost social support as it postponed the elections to prevent the return of the MAS and advance its economic project. Time, instead of favoring Añez, broadened her social rejection. The MAS, on the other hand, remained cohesive, not without tension, and benefited from the poor results of the coup d'état management.

During the months of Añez's presidency, the poverty indexes grew in a context aggravated by the pandemic, the plan to privatize state enterprises, the indebtedness to the International Monetary Fund, and corruption scandals like the purchase of respirators at a premium were exposed.

The firing of Ortiz exposed part of this plot. He denounced the fact that he had not signed a decree that opened the door to the privatization of the Empresa de Luz y Fuerza Eléctrica de Cochabamba: "I am not willing to sign any decree that goes against the legal system or does not have sufficient legal backing," he declared.

The economic situation, with 55.4%, is the main problem to be solved by the next government, according to the CELAG survey. It is followed by the health crisis, with 20.5%; corruption, with 19.8%, and political conflict, with 4.6%. Arce, who was Minister of Economy with Morales, has an important role to play for his achievements during this time.

Is the national and international power bloc that plotted and led the coup willing to lose the government by the votes less than a year after its victory? That is perhaps the main question circulating since Morales was overthrown. The threats to the electoral process encompass the days before the elections, as well as the actual proceedings of the day, and the hours and days after.

The contest on the 18th will be central for the country and Latin America. The coup

d'état in Bolivia was a turning point in a continent marked by a right-wing offensive coordinated with and from US foreign policy. The way in which the election takes place and the result will be a central chapter in this cycle of confrontations.

Source: [Internationalist 360°](#)

