

Bolivia: Arce's Victory Does Not Represent a Return to Morales' National Project

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The great victory of the Movement to Socialism (MAS) – Evo Morales' party – in Bolivia opens the way for a new era of change in the South American country. The positions on the Bolivian national political scene are currently so polarized that the socialist victory brings with it a series of uncertainties and arouses fears of a possible return to violence, which could reverse what was achieved at the polls.

The difference Arce has achieved so far does not allow him to wait any longer to announce that he is the new president of Bolivia. According to the count, he got 53% of the votes, while Mesa got 30%; the third, rightist Luis Fernando Camacho, won in the region to which he belongs, Santa Cruz, but obtained only 14% of the national votes. According to calculations, the difference between the official results and the data that was already released will be only 1% to 2%, so Arce is truly the new President.

Interestingly, the victory has been reasonably well accepted and recognized among opposition leaders. Jeanine Áñez acknowledged on the same night of the elections, through a tweet, that Arce is the new president of Bolivia. Hours later, the secretary of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro (who opposed Morales and supported the coup), published his own congratulatory tweet. Finally, it was Mesa's turn to congratulate the new president also through social media.

Apparently, the Bolivian opposition "accepted" the defeat – that is, the result of the elections and the democratic process. But one candidate does not seem to be satisfied with the popular choice: Luis Fernando Camacho, the biggest agitator of the Bolivian right. Camacho has gained prominence since the maneuvers that led to Morales' resignation last year and has since become the main name of the Bolivian right. In South America, Camacho is commonly referred to as "Bolivian Bolsonaro", due to some similarities with the Brazilian president: radical far-right speech, automatic alignment with the US and religious fundamentalism. Camacho did not congratulate Arce nor was satisfied with the third place and the insufficient 14% of the national votes. While Áñez and Mesa, who represent a more moderate wing of the opposition, have shown themselves willing to accept the victory of the MAS' candidate, Camacho has not yet made clear which will be his attitude.

It is with this backdrop that we can analyze the current Bolivian political conjuncture and make some predictions for the country's near future. Opposition to MAS no longer exists as it did while Evo Morales was in power. At that time, various sectors of the Bolivian political scenario came together in a coalition to overthrow Morales. This coalition was certainly financed and coordinated by foreign agents who were also interested in the end of the Morales government, which was characterized by a strong anti-American socialist policy. Now, with Morales out of Bolivia, the scenario is different: the opposition's common enemy

has already been defeated, so there is no reason for coalitions.

There is yet another factor that cannot be ignored: the current lack of strategic coordination by the opposition. The capacity for foreign interference in Bolivian national politics has decreased significantly in recent months, mainly due to the social chaos in which the US is inserted. The turmoil in the presidential elections undermines any form of strategy for American foreign policy: the priority of the Trump administration is to be re-elected; that of Democrats is to come to power; in any case, none of them are really concerned about the next Bolivian president – as long as Morales remains barred from running for president.

In this sense, the Bolivian opposition was left to its own devices and, having to face the popular will, saw the inevitable result: the victory of the party preferred by the Bolivian people. But this is far from representing a return to Morales' national project. Arce's victory represents a party's victory in the elections, not Morales's personal victory, despite the support received from the former president. The party previously recognized the "legitimacy" of the coup that overthrew Maduro, accepting the democratic pact to continue disputing power in institutional structures. In other words, in one way or another, the coup has been legalized and Morales will not return to power – precisely because of that, American concern is minimal.

However, a president's journey only begins with elections. The future is absolutely uncertain. And that is why Camacho's refusal to accept the result can be worrying for Arce. The American elections will soon be consummated, and someone will again be outlining clearer and more specific strategies for foreign policy. When that happens, what will Washington do with Arce? If it is in the American plans to make Bolivia even more subordinate to its interests, something like a new colorful revolution, judicial maneuver or institutional coup will be done to remove Arce quickly. And, certainly, Camacho and his supporters will again be a central figure if that happens.

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