

MIT Study Finds No Evidence of Fraud in Bolivian Election that Resulted in a Coup

By [Dave DeCamp](#)

Global Research, March 02, 2020

[Antiwar.com](#)

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

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Back in November 2019, former Bolivian President Evo Morales was ousted in a coup after claims of election fraud from the Organization for American States (OAS). A new MIT study into the October 20th presidential election [does not support the conclusions](#) of the OAS and casts further doubt on the already flimsy claims. Much damage has already been done, Morales fled the country, members of his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party have been arrested, and dozens of his supporters were shot and killed by police in the unrest that followed the coup.

The claims of election fraud stem from a 24-hour pause of the preliminary count system on election day. The counting was paused after 84 percent of the votes were tallied, at the time it showed Morales leading his closest opponent Carlos Mesa by just under eight percent. When the counting resumed the next day, Morales' lead increased to over 10 percent. In Bolivia's election system, a candidate is required to have over 40 percent of the votes, and a 10 percent lead to their nearest opponent to prevent a runoff vote.

The OAS claims that during this 24-hour pause in the preliminary count, manipulations occurred that resulted in Morales taking a large enough lead to prevent the runoff vote. The new [MIT study](#) examined the data and concluded, "The OAS's claim that the stopping of the trip (preliminary count) during the Bolivian election produced an oddity in the voting trend is contradicted by the data ... Therefore, we cannot find results that would lead us to the same conclusion as the OAS. We find it is very likely that Morales won the required 10 percentage point margin to win in the first round of the election on October 20, 2019."

The MIT study was commissioned by the Center for Economic Policy and Policy Research (CEPR). The CEPR conducted [their own study](#) on the election shortly after it happened that found "no evidence that irregularities or fraud affected the official result that gave President Evo Morales a first-round victory." In a [press release](#) that came out with the MIT study, CEPR Co-Director Mark Weisbrot said, "The OAS greatly misled the media and the public about what happened in Bolivia's elections, and helped to foster a great deal of mistrust in the electoral process and the results."

The MIT researchers wrote an article in *The Washington Post* on their findings. The OAS [angrily responded](#) to the article and said the researchers ignored the OAS findings in their [final report](#) on the election and focused mostly on the [preliminary report](#).

After the OAS released their preliminary report on the election in November 2019, Morales agreed to hold fresh elections and even said he would replace members of the electoral board that were responsible for the alleged fraud. These concessions were not enough for

Morales' opposition, who, along with the military, demand Morales step down. Morales fled to Mexico and eventually [ended up in Argentina](#), where he was granted asylum.

At least [35 people were killed, and 700 were wounded](#) in the post-election day unrest. Most of those killed and wounded were Morales supporters who [protested against the coup](#). Bolivia has a large indigenous population, and Morales being the country's first indigenous president, has much support in the community.

Morales' resignation was celebrated in Washington. In a [statement](#), President Trump called it "a significant moment for democracy in the Western Hemisphere." Florida Senator Marco Rubio also celebrated the news and [said](#), "Morales was illegitimately holding on to power in Bolivia after the recent presidential elections." Rubio's statement doesn't make much sense, considering Morales' term was not set to end until January.

Rubio, along with the OAS, expressed doubt over Morales' victory by a ten percent margin before the final votes were tallied. On October 21st, [Rubio tweeted](#),

"In Bolivia all credible indications are Evo Morales failed to secure necessary margin to avoid a second round in Presidential election. However some concern he will tamper with the results or process to avoid this."

Leaked audio recordings of coup plotters discussing their plans surfaced shortly after election day and was [reported on](#) by many Spanish-language media outlets. Among the topics discussed was the support the plotters had from US Senators Marco Rubio, Bob Menendez, and Ted Cruz, who would be willing to push for economic sanctions against Bolivia if Morales stayed in power. A [report](#) from *The Grayzone* shows that some of the military officials involved in these conversations attended WHINSEC, a military training school in Fort Benning, Georgia, formerly known as the School of the Americas (SOA).

The SOA is a notorious training ground for coup plotters and human rights abusers of Latin America. For example, graduates of the SOA [took part in the 1981 El Mozote massacre](#) in El Salvador, where a US-backed death squad slaughtered over 800 civilians. After being connected to such atrocities, and years of bad publicity, the SOA changed its name to WHINSEC. Antiwar activists still keep a close eye on the school. SOA Watch is a grassroots organization that [publishes data](#) on the school's graduates.

Morales expelled the US Agency for International Development (USAID) from Bolivia in 2013. US media outlets [portrayed](#) it as a paranoid move, but documents [released in 2009](#) show that USAID poured millions of dollars into anti-Morales opposition groups and programs from the time he was a presidential candidate in 2004. After Morales was elected at the end of 2005, those efforts were ramped up, USAID focused on decentralization and separatist projects in Eastern Bolivia. In January, President Trump [waived a restriction](#) on US assistance to Bolivia, paving the way for USAID to reenter the country.

The US-government funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) maintains a strong presence in Bolivia. In 2019, the NED [spent nearly one million dollars](#) on programs like, "Monitoring the National Election Process," "Promoting an Informed Electorate," and "Providing Independent News and Election Information."

Like Venezuela, Bolivia is rich in natural resources and sits on one of the [world's largest lithium reserves](#). As the world becomes more reliable on batteries and electronics, lithium may replace oil as the most sought-after resource. This fact certainly gave Washington some motivation to kick out a leftist president who would likely nationalize lithium.

The OAS also plays its part in advancing Washington's policies in Latin America. While the OAS consists of 35 member states, it is [mostly funded](#) by one member, the US. Since January 2019, the US and its allies have been pushing hard to oust Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. Before Juan Guaido declared himself interim president of Venezuela in January 2019, the OAS [Permanent Council agreed](#) "to not recognize the legitimacy of Nicolas Maduro's new term as of the 10th of January of 2019."

Under Morales, Bolivia remained one of the few OAS countries that still recognized Maduro as president of Venezuela. That changed rather quickly once right-wing Senator Jeanine Anez declared herself acting president of Bolivia. One of Anez's first moves was to [recognize Juan Guaido](#) as the "legitimate" president of Venezuela.

Since Anez took office, [many members](#) of Morales' MAS party have been arrested or are wanted by authorities. The most common charge the party members face is related to claims of election fraud. New presidential elections are set to take place on May 3rd, and the candidate leading the polls is Luis Arce, a member of the MAS party. The government of Jeanine Anez just [opened a corruption case](#) against Arce, in a move many see as an attempt to hinder his presidential run. It is tough to say what the future holds for the people of Bolivia, but it looks like the post-coup government is going to make every effort to keep the MAS party from power.

In 2017, Bolivia's supreme court [ruled against term limits](#), paving the way for Morales to run for a fourth term. The court's ruling went against a referendum that was held in 2016, where Bolivians voted in favor of term limits in a close vote of 51-49. Whether or not Morales' bid for a fourth term was legitimate is certainly up for debate, but that is a discussion for Bolivians to have.

It appears Morales was thrown out for false claims of election fraud, and while the post-coup government has the support of the OAS and Washington, it is unlikely much will be done to rectify it. The US has a long bloody history of overthrowing governments in Latin America, and these policies continue today through organizations like the NED and USAID. What President Trump called "a significant moment for democracy" was just the result of modern-day imperialism in Latin America.

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Dave DeCamp is assistant editor at [Antiwar.com](#) and a freelance journalist based in Brooklyn NY, focusing on US foreign policy and wars. He is on Twitter at [@decampdave](#).

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