

Shaping Public Opinion: The New York Times' Long History of Endorsing US-Backed Coups

The New York Times Editorial Board, it seems, rarely meets a coup backed by the US government that it doesn't approve of.

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*Bolivian **President Evo Morales** was overthrown in a [U.S.-backed military coup d'état](#) earlier this month after Bolivian army generals appeared on television demanding his resignation. As Morales fled to Mexico, the army appointed right-wing **Senator Jeanine Añez** as his successor. Añez, a Christian conservative who has [described](#) Bolivia's indigenous majority as "satanic", arrived at the presidential palace holding an oversized Bible, [declaring](#) that Christianity was re-entering the government. She immediately [announced](#) she would "take all measures necessary" to "pacify" the indigenous resistance to her takeover.*

This included [pre-exonerating the country's notorious security services](#) of all future crimes in their "re-establishment of order," leading to [massacres of dozens of mostly indigenous people](#).

The *New York Times*, the United States' most influential newspaper, [immediately applauded the events](#), its editorial board refusing to use the word "coup" to describe the overthrow, claiming instead that Morales had "resigned," leaving a "vacuum of power" into which Añez was forced to move. The *Times* presented the deposed president as an "arrogant" and "increasingly autocratic" populist tyrant "brazenly abusing" power, "stuffing" the Supreme Court with his loyalists, "crushing any institution" standing in his way, and presiding over a "highly fishy" vote.

This, for democratic-minded Bolivians, was "the last straw" and forcing him out "became the only remaining option," the *Times* extolled. It expressed relief that the country was now in the hands of "more responsible leaders" and stated emphatically that the whole situation was his fault; "There can be little doubt who was responsible for the chaos: newly resigned president Evo Morales," the editorial board stated in the first paragraph of one article.

The *Times*, according to Professor Ian Hudson of the University of Manitoba, co-author of ["Gatekeeper: 60 Years of Economics According to the New York Times"](#), remains America's most influential news outlet in shaping public opinion.

"Despite the changing media landscape and the financial troubles of old school journalism models - including the *New York Times* - it remains the agenda setter. Social media often use or respond to *Times* stories. It is still probably the single most referenced news outlet in the U.S. Other websites, like *Yahoo* get more hits, but they do not report or create their own stories. *The New York Times* still ranks as the top investigative and opinion setting news

organization" he told *MintPress News*.

The first draft of history

Newsrooms across America are sent advanced copies of the *Times'* front page so they will know what is "important news" and adjust their own coverage accordingly. In this way its influence extends well beyond its [nearly 5 million subscribers](#), its output becoming the first draft of history. Yet, when it comes to U.S. intervention, the *Times* offers its "consistent support" for American actions around the world, Hudson says, claiming that the latest Bolivia example "very much followed this trend." Indeed, there has rarely been an effort at regime change that the paper did not fully endorse, including the following six examples.

Iran 1953

In 1953, the CIA [engineered a coup](#) against the administration of Mohammad Mossadegh, installing the Shah as an autocrat in his place. Mossadegh, a secular liberal reformer, had angered Western governments by nationalizing Iran's oil industry, arguing that the country's resources should be owned by and used to benefit the people of Iran. The Shah presided over decades of terror and human rights abuses, finally being overthrown in the revolution of 1979.



The front page of the New York Times on August 20, 1953. Photo | [@OnThisDayNYT](#)

The *Times* expressed a "deep sense of relief," many felt that Mossadegh, a "fanatical power-hungry man" and a Kremlin stooge who had "wrecked the economy" in his "bid for dictatorship" had been deposed. The editorial board gave a warning to others who might try to nationalize industries owned by American corporations: "Underdeveloped countries with rich resources now have an object lesson in the cost that must be paid by one of their number which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism," it wrote, two days after Mossadegh's ouster.

Brazil 1964

Like Mossadegh, Brazilian **President Joao Goulart** was far from a communist; the center-left reformer who had been in power since 1961 modeled himself after John F. Kennedy. He was overthrown in a U.S.-supported military coup d'état that brought about over twenty years of fascist dictatorship that saw tens of thousands of people arrested and tortured.

Two days after the event, the *Times*' editorial board [announced](#), "We do not lament the passing of a leader who had proved so incompetent and so irresponsible." As with Bolivia, it refused to use the word "coup," instead claiming that Goulart, who "had almost no supporters," was deposed in "another peaceful revolution."

One month later, a [report entitled](#) "Brazil relieved by Goulart's Fall" claimed there was "no outcry or even concern" over the events, but instead a "widespread feeling of deep relief and optimism" in the country. It stated that all of Brazil had "written off" the "extremist" and "far leftist" "regime" and supported the "revolt" against him. In particularly Orwellian fashion, it claimed that the "nation appears to have been yearning" for a "political clean up" of "extremists," applauding the widespread imprisonment of officials in the Goulart administration on the grounds that they were "communists."

Chile 1973

The [overthrow](#) of the democratically-elected Chilean socialist Salvador Allende in 1973 and his replacement with the fascist dictator Augusto Pinochet is one of the most well-known and infamous events in CIA history. The fallout from Pinochet's economic mismanagement and reign of terror continues to this day and provides the backdrop for the [enormous anti-government protest movement](#) currently engulfing the country.

As soon as Allende was elected, the *Times* began a campaign to demonize the new leader, claiming that Chile's "free institutions" likely would not survive the "sharp turn to the left" he was proposing. The day after the coup, when Pinochet's forces bombed the presidential palace and forced Allende to commit suicide, the *Times* editorial board blamed the President for his own downfall, just as it did with Morales and with Mossadegh, [claiming](#):

No Chilean party or faction can escape some responsibility...but a heavy share must be assigned to the unfortunate Dr. Allende himself. Even when the dangers of polarization had become unmistakably evident, he persisted in pushing a program of pervasive socialism for which he had no popular mandate.

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

LATE CITY EDITION

Weather: Sunny and pleasant today; fair, cool tonight. Sunny tomorrow. Temp. range: today 58-71; Tuesday 60-61. Temp.-Hum. Index yesterday 71. Additional details on Page 11.

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FRENCH LEADER VISITS CHINA: President Pompidou waving to welcome on arrival in Peking. At left is Premier Chou En-lai, who greeted him at the airport. Details, Page 9.

ALLENDE OUT, REPORTED SUICIDE; MARXIST REGIME IN CHILE FALLS IN ARMED FORCES' VIOLENT COUP

U.S. NOT SURPRISED

But Officials Are Wary of Any Comment on Santiago Events

By DAVID BINDER
Special to The New York Times
WASHINGTON, Sept. 11—United States officials were not surprised by the Chilean armed forces' revolt today, but they declined to comment for the record, to avoid even a hint of commitment to the overthrow of President Salvador Allende Gossens or involvement in it.

According to information from the United States Treasury in Santiago, none of the 2,800 American citizens in Chile appeared to have been harmed in the rising, a State Department official reported. The embassy lies directly opposite the presidential palace where Dr. Allende held out for a time this morning, and the official said the embassy building had been hit by small arms fire. Some of the American corporations whose prop-



Augustin Pinochet Ugarte, left, the commander of Chile's Army, is a member of the four-man military junta that overthrew President Salvador Allende Gossens, at right.

JUNTA IN CHARGE

State of Siege Declared by Military Chiefs—Curfew Imposed

By The Associated Press
SANTIAGO, Chile, Wednesday, Sept. 12—President Salvador Allende Gossens was deposed yesterday in a violent military coup, and the Santiago police said that he had committed suicide rather than surrender to the attackers.
Dr. Allende, a Marxist who was elected President in 1970, was reportedly found slumped over a blood-stained sofa in the presidential palace, a bullet through his mouth. The palace had been captured after a 20-minute assault in which the military used bombers and heavy artillery.

Proclaiming a mission of liberating Chile "from the Marxist yoke," a four-man military junta took control of the Government and declared a state of siege. Curfew and a curfew were imposed. News Deadline Set

Lack of Funds Hampering
3 of 4 Mayoral Candidates

RECORD FORECAST
FOR '73 CORN CROP

12 SLACKERS SHOT,
CAMBODIANS HEAR

Senators See F.B.I. Report
On Kissinger and Wiretaps

Army Officers Are Reported
Killed for Calling Retreat
in Kompong Cham Battle

By BERNARD GIVERTZMAN
Special to The New York Times
WASHINGTON, Sept. 11—After they read the report at the Justice Department received today in the Capitol this morning, Mr. Speaker and some of House A. Kissinger's aide. Case out for two hours

The front page of the New York Times on September 12, 1973. Photo | [@OnThisDayNYT](https://www.onthisday.com/1973/09/12/)

It also pre-determined that the very obvious involvement of the U.S. government, conducting a campaign of economic war against Chile, in order to "[make the economy scream](#)" in the words of President Nixon and Henry Kissinger to the CIA, was non-existent. The board [advised that](#) "It is essential that Washington meticulously keep hands off the present crisis...There must be no grounds whatsoever for even a suspicion of outside intervention."

Venezuela 2002 and 2019

In April 2002, the U.S. government bankrolled and supported a coup attempt against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. In a consistent pattern, the *Times* editorial board came out to [heartily endorse proceedings](#), again deliberately refraining from using the word coup. Two days after the event it noted:

With yesterday's resignation of President Hugo Chavez, Venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened by a would-be dictator. Mr. Chavez, a ruinous demagogue, stepped down after the military intervened and handed power to a respected business leader, Pedro Carmona."

And like with other coups, the *Times* immediately treated the idea of U.S. involvement as utterly impossible, [adding](#), "Rightly, his removal was a purely Venezuelan affair."

What was unique about this event was that the coup was [dramatically overturned](#) by hundreds of thousands of people in the streets, who convinced military units loyal to Chavez to retake the presidential palace. Since then, successive U.S. governments have dedicated

significant resources to regime change in Venezuela. The *Times* also applauded self-declared President Juan Guaidó's attempt to gain power earlier this year, presenting him as a man of the people, [claiming](#) he was "cheered on by thousands of supporters in the streets and a growing number of governments, including the United States."

But as Guaidó's attempt collapsed under the weight of its own unpopularity, the *Times* [expressed its anger](#) that Maduro, a corrupt Russian agent, who pushed Venezuela "to utter ruin," remained in power. "It would be a great relief for Venezuela to be rid" of Maduro, [the editorial board mused](#), "the sooner the armed forces evict the thieves" the better, it said, disappointed that, for once, it could not celebrate a successful U.S. coup.

Manufacturing consent

Studying the *Times'* coverage of U.S.-orchestrated coup attempts, it becomes clear that there is a checklist of talking points it employs time and again to justify events.

1. *Blame all economic and political problems on the government; ignore the effect of any U.S. sanctions.*
2. *Constantly present the targeted leader as a tyrannical autocrat crushing dissent, no matter what the reality is.*
3. *Insist that the leader is actually a Russian plant controlled by the Kremlin.*
4. *Refrain from using the word "coup". Prefer instead words like "uprising", "revolt" or "transition".*
5. *Express ridicule at the idea that the U.S. could be involved in the affair.*
6. *Depict the new U.S.-backed rulers as democratically-minded and downplay any violence they commit in establishing their rule.*
7. *Blame the deposed leaders for their own overthrow.*

To be sure, the *New York Times* is not the only major media outlet guilty of reflexively supporting every U.S. action around the world. The [Economist](#) and the [Washington Post](#) both came out to support the coup in Bolivia, as they had [done before](#) with Venezuela. But the *Times'* position as "[the paper of record](#)" sets it apart in terms of importance.

This position makes it a crucial weapon in the propaganda war waged on the American people in order to manufacture consent for regime change abroad.

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