

Bolivia: The 21st Century Coup d'État and Its Crimes Against Humanity

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After the coup d'état, repression is advancing by leaps and bounds in Bolivia. The dictatorship persecutes the "narco-traffickers", "vandals" and "terrorists", that is to say: the social movements, former members of the government, peasants and indigenous people who demonstrate and are assassinated by the army (35 dead and more than 800 wounded). The de facto government criminalizes international human rights observation missions, the ombudsman's office and even journalists, calling them "digital warriors" or "computer terrorists". In so doing, it seeks to bury the truth under a mountain of false accusations.

Ultimatum to democracy, parade of neo-fascism

Since the October 20 elections, Bolivia has been going through a political crisis that is far from over. In the framework of an electoral process that received special attention from the international media, the vice-president of the Electoral Tribunal resigned for obscure reasons, casting a shadow of suspicion over Evo Morales' victory by 47.08% of the votes cast. A difference of 10% (648,180 votes) over former right-wing president and candidate Carlos Mesa was enough to win the elections in the first round.

In fact, Mesa did not wait for the results to denounce what for him was an advertised fraud: he had been predicting it for months. Self-fulfilled prophecy or flight forward? Meanwhile, billionaire Fernando Camacho, whose name appears on the "Panamanian Papers" and who had lost a lucrative market share in his gas distribution contracts when Evo Morales arrived in government in 2006 and decided to nationalize the hydrocarbons to renegotiate the contracts, announced a 48-hour deadline for Evo to resign.



It was in that context when the violence of the opposition was unleashed with an unknown fury: the departmental [electoral tribunals](#) and [headquarters](#) of the MAS burned, their representatives such as the mayor of Vinto in Cochabamba Patricia Arce, the former vice minister of interculturalism Feliciano Vegamonte [were lynched and assaulted](#)....but also the directors of media such as Bolivia TV and CSUTCB Radio (Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Campesinos), José Aramayo, the latter being tied to a tree, giving rise to a scene more typical of the medieval Inquisition.

The president of the chamber of deputies Víctor Borda resigned after [denouncing](#) the burning of his house and the kidnapping and aggression in his home of his brother, lawyer Marco Antonio Borda, by members of the “Civic Committee of Potosí”. Days later, his brother made public a [video](#) addressed to international organizations, while he was recovering in a hospital bed. In it, he denounced that “apparently there were orders to attempt against my life to ask for the resignation of my brother (...) If the President had not [resigned](#), my life would have been in danger”. Mining Minister César Navarro also resigned after the fire at his home in Potosí and the attempt to hang his nephew. The same script is meticulously applied by criminals acting under the cover of so-called “civic committees”, [financed](#) by Fernando Camacho. Everything fits: Camacho himself unscrupulously threatened those who resisted the coup, saying that he had prepared a black list of “traitors” [in a “Pablo Escobar style”](#).

Interlude masterfully played by the OAS, score written by Washington

With a view to the October 19 elections, Bolivia had implemented all the recommendations of the Organization of American States (OAS) regarding the improvement of the electoral process. Several meetings had taken place between the government of Evo Morales and Secretary Almagro. It was necessary to ensure the much-desired “transparency” and “credibility” in the face of the usual suspicions directed towards governments considered “populist”. The rapid-counting system called TREP was part of that reassuring mechanism... But that supposed life jacket turned out to be a spearhead. The gear of media manipulation was lubricated to perfection by attempting to erase the traditional recount in a country where the rural and indigenous vote has historically been favorable to MAS.

The former vice president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) Antonio Costas, who resigned from his post, did not do so because he questioned the functioning of the TREP

quick count, which he considered positive because it “generates a lot of trust and discourages fraud. However, he believed that “the process could be interrupted by a hacking” of a concurrent company of the audit. After verification by Costas and the TSE, the TREP data after the stop detected as a hack was the same. Because, when they gave the first report “the advance was very strong, with around 10%”. According to Costas, “the data was not modified”: “The OAS engineers were with the TSE all the time at the time of the TREP transmission, taking photographs of the advance very closely and the TSE had an advance until 22h of almost 94%, but we had suspended the information at 83%. It was the knowledge of the OAS that the development from 83 to 94 % in a reasonable period with 380 operators transmitting the information”. There was also no violence during election day: “more than 200 observers have certified the tranquility of the day”.

The president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), María Eugenia Choque, clarified that the TREP “was suspended in order to avoid confusion with the result of the departmental computer system”. The official assured that they decided to suspend this system because the departmental courts started with the official computation and the TES could not “have two results working at the same time. According to Chancellor Diego Pary, “there was no interruption in the TREP,” but the official count replaced it. But “at the request of the observation missions, the TREP count was restarted 24 hours later. A new trend was unveiled, incorporating votes from more remote regions of the country.

The coup d'état in Bolivia has brought to light the double game of the OAS. It immediately announced, even before the final results were known, that the electoral process was not credible. The U.S. State Department [was quick to assert](#) that “the United States strongly supports the October 23 OAS observation report, which reveals a number of irregularities that need to be corrected. Thus it made clear to the “free world” what was the position of the world gendarme towards the Bolivian electoral process.

Evo Morales' government then accepted his proposal to send an audit mission. But candidate Mesa rejected the OAS mission, fanning the flames. The coordinator of the OAS electoral audit [even had to resign](#) to give credibility to the report, as he was the author of a series of articles against the Morales government! Yet Evo accepted his replacement and pledged to make the result binding. Finally, the OAS audit's [preliminary communiqué](#) on the electoral process arrived a week later, two days ahead of schedule. It was not surprising that it denounced irregularities. President Evo accepted new elections. But Mesa and Camacho rejected them. Despite President Evo's announcement that he would respect the conclusions of the OAS report and allow new elections, the opposition followed its coup strategy. Its objective was precise: to force Evo out, to persecute masism and thus put an end to a collective historical subject.

Shortly before his resignation speech, Evo Morales acknowledged that the OAS had made “a political and not a technical report”. Having overcome another coup attempt shortly after becoming president in 2006, Evo's government could have prepared for that eventuality. Wikileaks' revelation of confidential cables could have even helped anticipate the modus operandi. On August 21, 2009, Hillary Clinton asked her embassy in La Paz: how prepared is the opposition to use violence if necessary? Do you have any plans to counter security forces for defensive or offensive purposes? In another cable on September 10, 2009, Hillary insisted, “Do opposition leaders or groups plan to protest or demonstrate if they suspect election fraud? Do they have a plan to abstain from voting or attempt to commit fraud?

In contrast to the speed with which the OAS issued its first incendiary communiqué, the [final report](#) arrived with great delay almost a month later, on December 4. In response, a hundred international experts [have demanded](#) that “it withdraw misleading statements about the elections, which have contributed to the political conflict and have served as one of the ‘justifications’ most used to consummate the military coup”. Given this precedent, as well as recent examples of OAS interference in the cases of [Nicaragua](#) and Venezuela, it will be necessary for the people to draw their own conclusions. After the coup in Bolivia, what country will take the OAS seriously, enabling it to issue certificates of democracy?

Media war at its peak

Against the backdrop of a properly mediatized suspicion of fraud, violence took on increasing dimensions, although it was tolerated. After being singled out as government supporters, journalists and public service media workers were attacked, humiliated and prevented from working. The police seemed not to act after the opposition came to meet them and convinced them to join the coup. It was probably prepared in advance. The mutiny of police forces in Cochabamba and other departments was duly staged and [mediatized](#) by banners announcing “We don’t want dialogue, all together for democracy!” and others visualizing a rude caricature of President Evo hanging face up from his private parts. The psychological and media warfare reached its peak when fear seized masism, as the criminal attacks of the opposition counted on the passivity of the police forces and the army barracks. With their help, an authentic strategy of terror could be carried out: members of the government were threatened, kidnapped, their private homes burned with impunity, and they ended up resigning their positions under the pressure of reprisals against their families.



To the left, Cochabamba police riot greeted by civilians equipped with helmets, truncheons and artisanal rocket launchers (photo: France 24). To the right, children’s illustrations broadcast on social networks by the Cruceña Youth Union, aimed at disguising violence.

In those moments, with the betrayal of the security forces, the destiny of plurinational Bolivia was at stake. It was the event that tipped the balance in favor of a coup strategy conceived as a set of combined forces. An opposition whose sole purpose was to sabotage democracy. Its objective? Allowing once again the plundering of national wealth and preventing the industrial development of Bolivia from its significant reserves of lithium. The

military command entered the scene: it “suggested” to President Morales that he resign the presidency for the good of the country. On November 10, Evo Morales was forced to resign in order to end the violence of the opposition and avoid a bloodbath. Significantly, the shock groups or motorcyclists went out [to celebrate](#) the arrival of what they consider democracy... many of them still hooded!

Once the coup was consummated, those same forces went out to repress without any qualms those who resisted, whom private sector media described as “[mobs](#)”, “vandals,” or “radicals. Contrary to the idea that one could get a “dictatorship” installed 14 years ago, the private press combined with the use of social networks played a crucial role in justifying the coup d’etat through a propaganda campaign in which the role of the victim and the aggressor was inverted and President Evo Morales demonized. In what tyrannical regime could the media have become so open and free on the side of coup sectors?

It’s time to call the facts by name. Neofascist groups played a decisive role in this real coup. A privileged place was reserved for them, favouring the organisation of armed militias acting in cooperation with the police forces. Groups like the Unión Juvenil Cruceñista, defined by the International Federation of Human Rights as a “fascist paramilitary group”. On November 25, its members occupied the headquarters of the Santa Cruz Federation of Peasant Workers’ Unions to burn their equipment and documentation. In Bolivia, the thugs and the military are now making their own rules. It is impossible to imagine in the current context any kind of “transition” without continuing the bloodshed.

Imputing the Massacres to the victims themselves

On Friday, November 15, a march of peasants from the 6 Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba was on the Huayllani bridge, from Sacaba to Cochabamba. This strategic place of connection with the capital of the department was the object of an important security forces deployment to prevent the coca growers of the Chapare from entering the city. The result was a [bloody massacre](#) that resulted in 9 deaths and dozens of wounded. Through videos recorded by the peasants themselves, the excessive use of chemical weapons could be evidenced. In addition, several testimonies evidenced the use of military weapons used by soldiers from helicopters flying over the place. On the same day, Jeanine Añez had signed decree 4078 allowing the Armed Forces to use military weapons without further responsibility, with the aim of neutralizing the social movements in favor of Evo Morales. This document also specified that all public and private entities of the State should provide support to the Military Forces. The media and social networks inoculated in people’s minds the crazy idea that the marchers had shot each other to attract attention, and that the government’s repression was justified to “pacify the country” after the coup.

In Senkata, El Alto, a new massacre took place that the private sector media justified as a sort of “preventive attack,” using the idea that the demonstrators, presented as “terrorists,” would have sought to provoke an explosion of the gas plant that would have made the city of El Alto disappear.



De facto President Añez spared no resources in presenting the aggressor as a victim and vice versa: “we never thought of attacking, we were being attacked (...) from the Army (...) no bullets were fired (...) There was information from experts telling us that if a flame ignites in Senkata, all of El Alto can fly. Those who conceived this [trope](#) reached the pinnacle in the art of propaganda. However, contrary to the lie repeated a thousand times that the army did not shoot “not a single bullet,” different [testimonies](#) affirm that the mortal victims were targeted from helicopters.

During its observation mission, the IACHR (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights), which is not suspected of bias in favor of Evo’s government, collected numerous testimonies of the Sacaba and Senkata massacres and denounced that currently there is “no guarantee of the independence of the judiciary” in Bolivia. In response, on December 6, the self-proclaimed president approved the “supreme decree 4100” with the aim of compensating the families of the 35 dead and hundreds injured by the repression she herself ordered. The price to buy their silence? 50,000 bolivianos, just over 7,000 dollars. A fully-fledged “blackmail” for the spokespersons of the victims, who have already announced their willingness to take the case to the United Nations. Immediately a group of spokespersons replied: “We don’t want your money, it’s blackmail”. The silence of the victims is not bought. The IACHR declared its concern at the decree, for including a clause that would make it impossible for victims to appeal to international bodies to claim their rights. This would represent a violation of the commitments undertaken when ratifying the Rome Statute, in particular the principle of non-applicability of statutory limitations in the matter of crimes against humanity.

Frenetic political-judicial persecution

The persecution, arbitrary detentions and death threats against those responsible for the

dismissed government and their families are increasing day by day. The same pattern used to achieve the coup remains active until the dictatorship's goal of ending all resistance to the coup is achieved. This is how anyone who can be used as a scapegoat to launder their crimes continues to be preventively detained.

In recent weeks, the Bolivian Ombudsman's Office, which confines itself to carrying out an assessment of human rights and counting the victims, has been harassed and its workers [were prevented](#) from carrying out their work. Its representative in Cochabamba, Mr. Nelson Cox, questioned "the role played by the Attorney General's Office and the Police with respect to the cordon and protests in the Ombudsman's Office facilities, calling those bodies permissive in the face of acts of aggression. The mere existence of this organization is unacceptable to the coup plotters. Rabid at this small demonstration of resistance, the representatives of the de facto government incite their followers to attack the members of the Defensoría even in their [private homes](#): "They have carried out explosions of firecrackers in my home, they have accused me of committing illicit acts, of drug traffickers, murderers, terrorists (...), they have made threats against my daughters and my family" - declared Mr. Cox.

Far from being satisfied with having seized power by force, the de facto government is aware that its legitimacy hangs by a thread. That is why the repression must take a prominent turn until the next elections are organised. Without delay, [special anti-terrorist units](#) were presented with great pomp, presumably announcing the next crimes that will go unpunished.

Without fear of ridicule, on December 6, the self-proclaimed president announced the creation of an ["inter-institutional committee for the defense of victims](#) for political and ideological reasons of the last 14 years". Shortly before, Añez [had congratulated](#) the spokesman of the paramilitary gangs that terrorized the population in the decisive moments of the coup, acting with the complicity of the police and the army (house fires, lynchings, racist attacks, etc.).

And if it was still necessary to demonstrate the kind of people Añez considers victims, on the same day four miners were released who were convicted for the torture and murder of the deputy interior minister Rodolfo Illanes in August 2016.

On 11 November, the president and former vice-president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), Maria Eugenia Choque and Antonio Costas, [were arrested along with 34 members](#).

On November 27, Chuquisaca governor Esteban Urquizu was preventively detained for "leaving office" after he resigned on November 10.

On December 3, former Minister of Productive Development Susana Rivero Guzmán denounced "Death threats to my son, destruction of our small house in La Paz and a hostile climate of intimidation of the family. For that reason, she announced her willingness to "turn to international human rights protection bodies.

On December 4, Idelfonso Mamani, a former member of the TSE (Supreme Electoral Tribunal), was arrested. The accusation read: "it is presumed that the TSE assigned the printing of the electoral material to one printing press, however, the work was done by another".

On December 6, the departure from the country of former Economy Minister Luis Arce Catacora was announced, who was able to benefit from the asylum offered by Mexico. On the same day, former Communication Minister Amanda Dávila was accused of using funds from the State Publishing House to print MAS campaign material. Dávila denounced having been the victim of a montage through a photo of the visit of Morales' daughter.

This non-exhaustive list allows us to understand that what is underway is a frenetic political-judicial persecution against all members of previous Morales governments, casting a shadow of suspicion on the issue of corruption, in order to challenge and completely erase the memory of 13 years of the process of change in Bolivia, whose economic and social balance has been recognized worldwide, in particular [by reducing extreme poverty by 23%](#).

Confession of crimes against humanity

Because the best defense is attack, "government minister" Murillo, who incited "hunting" members of the ousted government and tried to intimidate those who defended them, has made public his intention to bring Evo Morales before the International Criminal Court in The Hague "for crimes against humanity," blaming him for the 35 deadly victims, even after his resignation and exile from the country. To endorse a president who has deposed the responsibility for the victims of a regime that has militarized the country and repressed protest is to show boldness without limits, or a way to convince himself of the impunity he believes he can count on after [resuming](#) full relations with the United States.

Murillo undoubtedly tries to use everything in his power to invest the victim and the aggressor. This is how he has tried [to present](#) Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera as a "confessed terrorist" and a "narco-guerrilla", reactivating the imaginary vision of the Cold War dictatorships. He has also widely released an [audiotape](#) in which Morales is supposedly heard encouraging the blockade of cities in order for the population to resist the coup. Whether an authentic or false document, the preamble to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, clearly inspired by the French declaration of 1789, implicitly foresees the right to rebellion in situations marked by the absence of democratic and constitutional guarantees: "It is essential that human rights be protected by a rule of law, so that man is not compelled to the supreme recourse of rebellion against tyranny and oppression."

In fact, the de facto government of Añez-Murillo was imposed by an army whose first mission has been to crush protest and teach the humble people of rural areas a lesson, depriving them of their right to vote and their participation in democratic life after centuries of exclusion. Its foreseeable function is to conceal and justify the current wave of repression. But the dignified people of the Plurinational State of Bolivia carry on their backs an experience of centuries of resisting with iron determination the tyranny of colonialism and its successors. It is time to understand that disinformation campaigns are a global mechanism whose objective is to break the sovereignty of the peoples of the world and demolish the bridges of solidarity. The apostle of Cuban independence José Martí [summed it up](#) in an unbeatable way: "*Nations that remain strangers must rush to know one another, like soldiers about to go into battle together (...)*"

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