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FEATURED Q&A

Will Morales Have a Big Influence in Bolivia's Election?



Bolivia's interim government has banned former President Evo Morales from running in the country's May 3 election. His party is expected to select its candidate next Sunday. // File Photo: Bolivian Government.

Q Former Bolivian President Evo Morales said recently that his Movement for Socialism, or MAS, party on Jan. 19 will name its candidate for the country's upcoming presidential election. Conservative interim President Jeanine Áñez has vowed to hold new elections following the country's disputed October vote, and the government has set May 3 as the date for the new election. How much influence will Morales have on the election? Will the election lead to political stability in Bolivia? What conditions must surround the vote in order for its winner to be seen as legitimate? Which candidates have the best chances of winning?

A Kathryn Ledebur, director of the Andean Information Network in Cochabamba: "New elections can only foster political stability if there is a level playing field and a fair, transparent electoral process. These indispensable guarantees include the extension of the democratically elected legislature's mandate, ending on Jan. 22, until the swearing in of newly elected officials. The interim administration should limit its actions to organizing and facilitating elections. MAS, the largest national party, must have the right to choose candidates and campaign freely without risk of arbitrary detention. Áñez officials must refrain from threats and arrests of journalists, MAS officials and critics on sedition and terrorism charges, order security forces to cooperate fully with legal and rights investigations, and actively protect national human rights defenders, such as personnel from the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman. The Trump administration has announced USAID support for the electoral process, and potentially further coopera-

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TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

U.S. Bans Public Charter Flights to Cuba, Except for Havana

The U.S. State Department announced a ban on public charter flights from the United States to Cuba, except for Havana. The order affects nine Cuban airports.

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BUSINESS

Uber Halting Service in Colombia After Court Ruling

The ride-hailing company said it would cease operations in Colombia after losing a court ruling that taxi drivers had brought, alleging unfair business practices.

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POLITICAL

Guaidó Calls for More Protests in Venezuela

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó, who has international recognition as Venezuela's president, called for more protests against the government of President Nicolás Maduro.

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Guaidó // File Photo: Facebook page of Juan Guaidó.

ECONOMIC NEWS

U.S. Bans Charter Flights to Cuba Excepting Havana

The Trump administration on Friday banned all public charter flights from the United States to Cuban cities other than Havana, saying the move was needed to restrict revenue to Cuba's government and its support for Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro. The order affects nine Cuban airports that currently receive charter flights from the United States, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement. Operators of public charter flights will have 60 days to wind down and discontinue the affected flights, Pompeo added. Additionally, he said the U.S. Department of Transportation will implement a new limit on the number of allowed public charter flights to Havana's José Martí International Airport. The new restrictions follow a Trump administration order on Oct. 25 that suspended commercial air service to Cuban cities other than Havana, Pompeo said. "Today's action will further restrict the Cuban regime's ability to obtain revenue, which it uses to finance its ongoing repression of the Cuban people and its unconscionable support for dictator Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela," Pompeo said in the statement. "In suspending public charter flights to these nine Cuban airports, the United States further impedes the Cuban regime from gaining access to hard currency from U.S. travelers." In response, Carlos Fernández de Cossío, the general director for the United States at the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called the new restrictions another punishment inflicted on Cuba's people and government, The Wall Street Journal reported. "Vicious attempt to pressure Cuba economically to bend our political will and step on our sovereign rights has proven to be nasty and damaging, but unsuccessful," said de Cossío. Also, in a posting on Twitter, Cuban Ambassador to the United States José Ramón Cabañas said the new rules would only lead more passengers to use domestic airlines to travel within Cuba, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Brazil Delays Auction for 5G Spectrum At Least Until Late 2020

Brazil's auction for 5G spectrum, originally scheduled for March, has been delayed to the end of the year or early next year amid a dispute over the bidding rules, the Financial Times reported Sunday. A spokesman for the country's telecommunications regulator, Anatel, postponed public consultations, adding that there was no current timetable for the auction. Analysts say the first quarter of next year is



We are on the verge of this revolution..."

— Tiago Machado

a more likely scenario for the tender. Some probable participants lamented the delays. "We are on the verge of this revolution, and we need policymakers and regulatory [agencies] to take the proper measures to make sure this goes forward in a timely manner," Tiago Machado, director of government relations for Ericsson in South America, told the Financial Times. Other international companies, such as China's Huawei and Finland's Nokia, are among the auction's likely participants. The delays could help Brazil avoid a standoff with the United States over Huawei's role in the auction. The United States has pressured a number of countries to exclude the Chinese company from 5G plans, alleging it uses the technology to spy for the Chinese government. Brazil's minister for science, technology, innovation and communications, Marcos Pontes, said last week that Brazil would not accept such U.S. pressure. "A good partner always understands the needs of the other," he said, Bloomberg News reported. "Just as Brazil makes no claim over what business the U.S. does with China and whether this affects or not our agribusiness." [Editor's note: See summary of an [event](#) on 5G last November at the Inter-American Dialogue.]

NEWS BRIEFS

Another Strong Quake Rattles Puerto Rico

A 6.0-magnitude earthquake struck Puerto Rico on Saturday morning, causing further damage days after a 6.4 earthquake shook the island, WBUR-FM reported. The Saturday earthquake hit eight miles south of Indios at a shallow depth of six miles, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Nearly 2,000 people remain in shelters along the U.S. territory's southern coast, where the quakes knocked down homes and schools. The U.S. government has not yet declared a major disaster, which would free up aid, CBS News reported.

Salvadoran Prosecutors Issue Arrest Warrant for Former Legislative Chief

Prosecutors in El Salvador said Friday that they have issued an arrest warrant for Sigrifido Reyes, the former head of the country's Legislative Assembly from 2011 to 2015, on money laundering charges, the Associated Press reported. Attorney General Raúl Melera said Reyes and at least 14 associates allegedly laundered nearly \$6 million in proceeds from fraud and embezzlement. Reyes is a former member of the FMLN, the leftist guerrilla coalition turned political party. Reyes called the charges "crude political persecution."

Grupo Financiero Banorte Signs Deal With China's Sinosure

Mexico's Grupo Financiero Banorte announced Sunday that it had signed an agreement with the China Export & Credit Insurance Corporation, also known as Sinosure, to finance projects in Mexico that involve Chinese exports, Reuters reported. The Mexican bank will offer credit to Mexican businesses and other organizations that seek to buy Chinese goods or services. Sinosure will provide Banorte insurance and credit guarantees.

POLITICAL NEWS

Venezuela's Guaidó Urges More Protests Against Maduro

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó on Saturday called for more protests against the government of President Nicolás Maduro, Reuters reported. "We have to go into the streets to protest and make demands, we have to push together," Guaidó told several hundred people at a rally in the Montalbán neighborhood of western Caracas. The rally was Guaidó's first after government troops blocked him from entering the National Assembly on Jan. 5, when he was up for re-election as the body's leader. Pro-government legislators gathered inside to swear in their own leader, but the opposition gathered later at a newspaper office to re-elect Guaidó and then, two days later, pushed into the National Assembly building to swear him in for another term as the Assembly's president.

BUSINESS NEWS

Uber Ending Service in Colombia After Court Ruling

Ride-hailing app Uber announced on Friday that it was ending its service in Colombia next month, Agence France-Presse reported. Uber recently lost a case brought forward by taxi drivers for alleged unfair business practices. The head of Colombia's Industry and Commerce Department, which regulates the market, said Uber was benefiting from "unfair competition" and a "significant advantage" over traditional taxi services. The tech company had appealed the decision but said in a statement on Friday that the case was the reason why "Uber will cease to work in Colombia." San Francisco-based Uber has nearly two million active users and about 88,000 drivers in the South American country.

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tion, although there is no funding allocated to Bolivia. This cooperation could provoke further conflict and mistrust due to Trump officials' statements supporting Áñez and a complicated history of bilateral relations. A proposal to rebuild electoral infrastructure destroyed during the conflict should take priority. Contradictory statements and dramatic shifts in OAS positions during the vote count and ensuing conflict highlight that U.N. and E.U. representatives should take the lead in electoral monitoring. MAS is internally debating potential candidates with some regional differences of opinion; undoubtedly Morales will be consulted and will not unilaterally select candidates. Coca grower leader Andrónico Rodríguez, Morales' appointed successor, will most likely run for vice president, accompanying a seasoned presidential candidate."

A **Iván C. Rebolledo, managing partner at TerraNova Strategic Partners and president of the Bolivian-American Chamber of**

Commerce: "Evo Morales' influence over the past few weeks has clearly begun to wane. In recent meetings that he has convened in Argentina for his followers, attendance has been minimal. The MAS party has begun to show divisions between the hardliners (Andrónico Rodríguez, currently vice president of the Federation of Coca Growers) and more moderate/progressive leaders (Eva Copa, president of the Senate). Senator Copa played a key role in moving the new electoral law/process forward, which won her the wrath of hardline MAS elements within her party and the Legislative Assembly. Everyone now awaits who MAS will name as its candidate, with speculation that a centrist will be chosen in an attempt to be a unifying force within the party and attract more votes nationally. In a Jan. 2 UNITEL poll, 66 percent of the population is still unsure for whom they will vote in May. In that same poll, the MAS party led in popularity, followed by current interim President

Jeanine Áñez, who has said she will not run, followed by Carlos Mesa and Marco Pumari (leader of the Comité Cívico de Potosí). The phenomena of the Luis Fernando Camacho/Marco Pumari candidacy is interesting with its constant ups and downs and has

“Evo Morales' influence over the past few weeks has clearly begun to wane.”

— Iván C. Rebolledo

clearly shaken up the electoral landscape for traditional candidates. One of the first steps of this transitional government was to appoint a new Supreme Electoral Tribunal, which is composed of renowned and respected electoral scholars and professionals who will clearly contribute to the legitimacy of the upcoming elections, along with the participation of the international community."

A **Beatrice Rangel, member of the Advisor board and director of AMLA Consulting in Miami Beach:** "Evo Morales will always be influential within his party and in the coca growing region of Chapare, given his role in creating MAS and in supporting the drug trade, which has enhanced the well-being of coca producers. But the time has come for Bolivia and the rest of Latin America to get serious about facing the modern-day scourge represented by transnational organized crime. MAS will have to choose between continuing to be led by an authoritarian thug with links to organized crime and becoming a party that represents the interests of working people in Bolivia. In the first case, it could be prosecuted as a criminal organization. For the vote to further democracy in Bolivia, the election needs to be internationally organized and supervised by a country or group of countries that have exercised democracy for more than a cen-

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ture. Most successful candidates will most certainly be those who have sprung from the civic movement that was at the root of the Morales downfall. Ultimately, it was the civil society who set the limits to authoritarian rule.”

A **Jaime Aparicio, former Bolivian ambassador to the United States:** “The resignation and escape of Evo Morales to Mexico resulted in an international campaign of misinformation. Following the ‘malicious manipulation’ of the October elections, which the OAS and European Union publicly denounced, the election was canceled by the Bolivian Legislative Assembly itself, which MAS controls with a two-thirds majority. Bolivians expect the revival of democratic institutions and the rule of law. The Legislative Assembly has unanimously elected a new Electoral Tribunal, chaired by a well-known electoral expert, Salvador Romero. He is regarded as having the legitimacy, knowledge and prestige necessary to build confidence in the new electoral process. However, the elections will take place in the midst of deep political, moral and social fractures, which the Morales government promoted over the last 15 years. His level of influence in the next election remains to be seen. He recently summoned the leaders of his party to meet in Buenos Aires in order to elect the MAS candidates, but a significant number of his party’s indigenous leaders have decided not to attend. Therefore, it is foreseeable that dissident groups, mostly indigenous not involved in the coca business, will designate their own candidate regardless of Morales’ decisions. While Morales and the ‘cocaleros’ seem to be more interested in destabilizing the democratic process, new actors from MAS are embracing the democratic game. Among them is the current president of the Senate, Eva Copa, a young indigenous leader from El Alto. Morales’ party may force a ballottage, especially if the opposition runs with a variety of candidates, as seems to

be the case. However, everything seems to indicate that in the case of a second round, any candidate opposed to Morales would get massive support from citizens who peacefully resisted Morales’ authoritarianism.”

A **Miguel Centellas, Croft instructional assistant professor of sociology and international studies at the University of Mississippi:** “The upcoming elections will be a severe test for Bolivia’s democratic institutions. While MAS remains the largest single political party, its candidate is not likely to win a majority—and might not meet the 40 percent threshold necessary to avoid a runoff election. Carlos Mesa remains fairly popular as a figure of the establishment opposition. But the field will be crowded by a new generation of anti-MAS political figures, such as Fernando Camacho and Marco Pumari. The two leaders of their departmental ‘civic committees’ catapulted to center stage during the public protests against electoral fraud committed by Morales officials. All this points to the likelihood that no party will win a legislative majority, with votes and legislative seats split across a half dozen political parties, like in the 2002 election. But unlike 2002, Bolivia no longer has a ‘parliamentarized’ presidential system. Prior to the 2009 constitution, if no presidential candidate won a simple majority, then the newly elected legislature met to select a president from among the top two contenders. This type of system resembled a traditional parliamentary system, and political parties negotiated formal power-sharing coalition agreements. This system explained Bolivia’s democratic stability (when compared to Ecuador and Peru) from the mid-1980s through the 1990s. Without such a constitutional provision, I am skeptical that a broad ‘unity’ coalition can be formed. The most likely outcome is a minority president trying to govern alongside a fragmented and polarized legislature.”

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