

Audio of protest

If you've been keeping your attention on international politics lately, you've probably noticed that political discontent has exploded into direct action in a number of countries: of course, the protests in Hong Kong have long captured American attention, but there have also been a plethora of news stories about paralyzing demonstrations in Chile, Iraq, Lebanon, and Ecuador, just to name a few. In fact, the trend is so apparent that meta-analyses of the situation have already cropped up in *The Atlantic*, the *Washington Post*, the *BBC*, *NPR*, *Amnesty International*—I could go on. While writing this, I googled the phrase “protests around the world,” and counted about sixty stories from unique, English-language news agencies before the results stopped being relevant. When was the last time that you went seven pages deep in a Google search?

With so much information about so many events around the world, it's easy to have missed perhaps one of the most important stories of the last few weeks, the ouster of long-time Bolivian president Evo Morales and the assumption of the office by Jeanine Añez, a member of the right-wing opposition and relative unknown before her ascension. Supporters of her party, the Democrat Social Movement, have celebrated this as a return to democracy after Morales' attempts to hold on to power for a fourth term. Morales, members of his party, and his supporters, have derided it as a seizure of government by the Bolivian military and right-wing, brought about by an illegitimate senate session, kidnappings, and violence. If you're just hearing about this story for the first time, I know you're probably already lost so let's start with the nominal beginning in Bolivia's Presidential Elections in October. This is part one of a two-part series on the recent events in Bolivia. You'll part 2 next week.

News footage of spanish-language commentary on presidential elections

Evo Morales of the Movement for Socialism party, popularly known as MAS, had—as of the 2019 Bolivian Presidential Elections—been the President of Bolivia for about 13 years, serving three terms and seeking a fourth. Although the Bolivian constitution did not allow holders of public office to serve four terms, MAS nonetheless nominated Morales as their candidate for the 2019 election. Although a public referendum on the question of forth terms ruled against Morales' candidacy, this decision would later be reversed by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice in Bolivia, citing US influence on the outcome of the referendum.

Morales initially came to power on a slate of leftist policies, including socio-economic reforms, emphasis on issues facing indigenous and poor communities, combating poverty and illiteracy, and support for a mixed economy. His successes in reducing poverty, illiteracy, and

building a strong economy made Morales hugely popular, especially among historically underrepresented groups. As the first indigenous President of Bolivia, Morales also championed policies that supported marginalized indigenous people's groups; importantly, in 2009, Morales proposed a new constitution that redefined Bolivia as a secular state, rather than as a catholic one, placing catholicism on equal footing with indigenous beliefs. This constitution would go on to be approved by referendum with 61% of the electorate.

Although this string of successes would make him hugely popular, his reputation would take a series of blows in later years due to a string of corruption allegations along with criticism from the left that he was not living up to his professed values.

All of this brings us to the Presidential Elections last October. Although Morales initially claimed victory over his opponent, Carlos Mesa, with a lead of over 12%, allegations of irregularities quickly surfaced. Morales asked the pan-American intergovernmental organization Organization of American States to audit the election results. The conclusion they ultimately came to—that there had indeed been pro-Morales election interference—certainly wasn't the only reason for what came next, but it may have been a catalyst.

Morales resignation speech, translate some of this

This is Morales's resignation speech, broadcast on Sunday, November 10th. In the days prior, protests and counter-protests broke out across the nation, opponents of Morales taking to the streets to protest his presidency, clashing with police and MAS supporters. Violence would quickly escalate with an arson attack on a government minister's home and a brutal assault of Patricia Arce, a MAS mayor of Vinto, who was beaten, dragged through the streets, and covered in red paint. A conservative opposition leader in the eastern Santa Cruz region, Luis Fernando Camacho, called upon Bolivian people to take direct action against the Morales government. The day before Morales's resignation, Camacho told a group of supporters, quote " "He has 48 hours to step down, because at 7pm on Monday, we are going to take decisive action right here and we are going to make sure that he goes." Endquote. Camacho also called on the military to support the opposition movement. Morales and his supporters called this tantamount to asking for a military coup, accusing their opponents of inviting violence and bloodshed.

As the demonstrations continued, some members of the police began to join the anti-government forces. Shortly before Morales proffered his resignation, William Kaliman, the head of Bolivia's armed forces, appeared to throw the support of the military behind the anti-Morales movement. At a press conference, he said, quote "Given the escalating conflict the country is facing and in order to secure the life and safety of the population, we suggest that the

president resign his presidential mandate and allow the pacification and re-establishment of stability for the good of Bolivia.” Endquote.

It was in this context that Morales would go live on television to accuse his opponents of a “civic coup,” to call upon his supporters to keep fighting, and then resigning. Morales would later tweet that police had a warrant out for his arrest and that his home in Cochabamba had been attacked by anti-government protesters. Although Kaliman would claim that there was no such warrant for Morales’ arrest, video of what appeared to be people walking through Morales’ ransacked home did circulate on Twitter. The following day, Mexico’s foreign minister Marcelo Ebrard, announced that the country would be offering Morales asylum due to the danger to his life and safety in Bolivia, adding that Morales had already accepted their offer.

Morales’ exit was accompanied by massive resignations of other government ministers and politicians, including the vice-president and Senate President. For a few hours, no one quite knew who was in charge or even if there was anyone left in the line of succession.

Audio of Jeanine Añez

Enter stage left: Jeanine Anyez, conservative, catholic member of the Democratic Social Movement. Initially elected as a Senator from Beni, a region in northern Bolivia, with the Progressive Plan for Bolivia—National Convergence party, also known as PPB. The PPB was coalition of right-wing Bolivian parties formed before the 2009 elections that achieved initial success, becoming the second-largest party in the Bolivian legislature, before dissolving in 2013. Añez would later go on to join the Democrat Social Movement, also known as the Democratas, a party formed in 2013 by politicians associated with the Bolivian right.

The Democratás achieved limited success in the 2014 elections, winning only four deputy positions and a single senate seat, held by Añez. Although her party had a relatively insignificant presence, Añez would become second vice president of the Bolivian senate later in her term, serving in a special cabinet staffed by the Senate president, the first senate vice president, Añez, and three secretaries. Although second vice president was a largely ceremonial position, it did put Añez fifth in the line of Presidential succession.

So, in the hours of uncertainty after Morales’ and others’ resignations, it was this relatively unknown senator who would call a plenary session to declare that, lacking all others in the line of succession, the duty of the Bolivian presidency fell on her shoulders.

Audio of Añez’s speech in the chamber of deputies

This sudden plenary session was boycotted by members of MAS, who comprise a majority of the Bolivian legislature. Although without these lawmakers the session lacked a quorum—which

is to say the minimum number of members needed to make the proceedings of a meeting valid—the present minority of opposition lawmakers supported Añez’s claim to the presidency.

In a press conference following this plenary session, Añez declared, quote, “I assume Bolivia’s presidency as a revival of the democratic and constitutional order that was interrupted from November 28th, 2017,” enquote. November 28th is the date that the failed referendum was overturned by the Bolivian Supreme Court, allowing Evo Morales to run for a fourth term.

Añez’s calls for a return to democracy resonated with domestic and international opponents of Morales, as the police and military quickly backed her government. In addition, several foreign nations including the US, Britain, and Brazil recognized her as the acting president of Bolivia. Formerly close allies of the Bolivian government, including Mexico and Venezuela, refused to recognize Añez’s presidency.

Although Añez only committed to holding new elections in her first speeches as interim President, she quickly began to overhaul the composition of the federal government. In the audio clip you heard earlier, Añez is marching toward the Presidential Palace for her inauguration holding a massive, leather-bound Bible in her arms. “The Bible has returned to the Presidential palace,” she declares as the crowd around her cheers. The issue of religion is particularly important in Bolivia as indigenous groups have long been mistreated by a primary-Catholic government powers. Although, without her own explanation, it is impossible to say what exactly she meant by her comments, it is possible that she is referring to the 2009 amendment to the Bolivian constitution which defined Bolivia as a secular state rather than as a Catholic one. It is also possible that the statement was made with Morales himself in mind. During his Presidency, Morales made a point to celebrate indigenous holidays in the Presidential Palace. In a series of now-deleted tweets, Añez had previously referred to Morales as a, quote, “poor indian,” called the Aymara New Year celebration “satanic,” and posted a picture of indigenous Bolivians speaking to reporters with the caption “Indigenous?? Look.” In the photo, she had drawn a circle around the shoes of the indigenous interviewee. Although Añez denies posting any of the aforementioned tweets, reporters from AFP were able to confirm their legitimacy.

The contentious issue of religion was only one among many as Jeanine Añez took office. The days following were a flurry of policy shifts, as government cabinets were restaffed, foreign relations being made and broken, and laws were passed, giving the military sweeping immunity from prosecution in acts done in defense of the state. This last action would have deadly results for protestors.

We'll pick up this story next week, digging deeper into the first week of Anez's presidency, the uncertainty, the celebrations, the police violence, and the agreement that she would make with protestors a week later, on November 24th, which—among many things—called for new elections.

I'm Cameron Lallana and this has been International News. The music used in our report this week was 'Martian Landscape' by Breakmaster Cylinder. The news never sleeps and, frankly, neither do we. We'll be back next week.