

CONFLICT RISK DIAGNOSTIC BOLIVIA 2020



Image Source: Al Jazeera 2019

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Executive Summary

This analysis investigates the risk of conflict in the state of Bolivia using the nine-cluster indicator system of the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP). Though political tension in Bolivia has been dormant for the past two months, one of the following issue areas may induce conflict. Following extensive research and review, the report finds that history of armed conflict, militarization, governance and political instability, and population heterogeneity are moderate risks for conflict, while demographic stress, international linkages, economic performance, human development, environmental stress are a low risk for conflict. Though peaceful resolution would be the best outcome, it is likely that protests will erupt before, during, and potentially after the May 2020 national elections.

Stakeholders

<p>Venezuela and Cuba (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) Lima Accord/US</p>	<p>The instability of the Morales presidency has lead Bolivia to become polarized in their social ties with Cuba and Venezuela. Bolivia has severed ties with Cuba and Venezuela in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America for membership within the Lima Accord. It is highly dependent on the outcomes of the election as to whether Bolivia will be allied with Venezuela and Cuba or the United States.</p>
<p>Citizens</p>	<p>Given Bolivia’s destabilized democracy and a lack of trust surrounding the government, Bolivian citizens have a vested interest in the outcomes of the upcoming elections. The Indigenous populations risk the possibility of future marginalization based on the current policies of the Interim government, and democracy.</p> <p>The Pro-Morales community have primarily left-leaning ideals, with the Indigenous population making up a substantial portion of the demographic. There is strong support for Morales taking back the presidency, as they believe he supports a healthy and representative democracy. Anti-Morales supporters hold the ideal that Morales has lead Bolivian democracy into corruption and has fostered self-serving interests of politicians.</p>

Background

Evo Morales, Bolivia’s first indigenous president, came to power in December 2005, winning the election by the widest margin of any Bolivian president since 1982.¹ In 2016, a referendum was held to amend the 2009 Constitution of Bolivia to extend the presidential term limits from two to three. The majority of Bolivians voted against the amendment, but in 2017, a ruling by the Constitutional Tribunal overturned the results of the referendum, striking down any limits on presidential terms. Morales was thus able to run for what would be a fourth consecutive term in the 2019 elections.² On the night of the election, October 20th, the release of polling results abruptly stopped for almost twenty-four hours. When the results resumed, they showed that Morales had just barely secured the 10% margin to avoid a runoff.³ Accusations of fraud were raised by opponents, citizens, and the Organization of American States (OAS). Bolivians responded with violent protests, with pro and anti-Morales factions clashing with one another across the country. On November 10th, Morales was prompted to step down after the preliminary findings of the OAS’s audit of the election were released, revealing a pattern of manipulation and a flawed transmission system.⁴ Two days later, Morales flew to Mexico to seek political asylum and Jeanine Áñez, acting head of the Senate of Bolivia, was declared interim president until new elections could be held.⁵

History of Armed Conflict		Moderate Risk (Rising)
<p>Stabilizing Factors</p>	<p>On November 24th, 2019, a pacification deal was signed into law by Áñez. The 12-point pact annuls the contested election, paves the way for a new vote without Morales as a candidate, commits the government to protecting social leaders from persecution, compensating people who have lost family members in the tumult, and freeing those arrested in protests. Various indigenous leaders, farmers</p>	

	and unions have responded by ordering their followers to desist from their demonstrations. There have been no additional fatalities since. ⁶ Despite a history replete with military coups and dictatorships, Bolivia has not suffered a coup since 1978. The country has managed to avoid militarily induced changes in government since 1982, when democratic civilian rule was first introduced. ⁷
Destabilizing Factors	Since October 20 th , 2019, approximately 30 people have been killed in protests and clashes with the police and military. ⁸ The interim government has charged Morales and several leading figures of MAS with sedition and terrorism. ⁹ Stemming in part from the suspicion that Morales' government manipulated the results of the election, the accusations were also influenced by an audio recording that supposedly captures Morales issuing directives for his supporters to conduct subversive activities against the interim government. ¹⁰ The authenticity of the recording remains unconfirmed. A subsequent audio recording, however, was played on Bolivian radio stations, again suspected to be the voice of Morales, which called for the formation of armed militias. On January 16 th , Morales confirmed that the voice in the recording was in fact his own. He went on to retract his statement but affirms that Bolivians have a right to defend themselves against what he deems an illegitimate government. ¹¹
Assessment	Open dialogue between the interim government and civil society, and their mutual willingness to make concessions, is integral to restoring stability in Bolivia. The pacification deal demonstrates the interim government's commitment to the preservation of the rule of law by guaranteeing the safety of social leaders and releasing protesters. Yet, the accusations towards the Morales administration will increase the polarization of the country, regardless of their veracity. Similarly, Morales' call for the formation of militias risks a degeneration into violence, reversing the progress that has been made since November.

Militarization		Moderate Risk (Rising)
Stabilizing Factors	From 2014 to 2018, Bolivia's overall military expenditures (% GDP) steadily decreased (1.9% to 1.5%); arms imports decreased (\$46 million USD to \$1 million USD); and the total number of armed forces personnel remained modest—71,000, or 1.37% of the total labor force. ¹² In late November, Interim Bolivian President Jeanine Áñez agreed to revoke her controversial decree that granted the military broad discretion in their use of force against protesters. ¹³	
Destabilizing Factors	In the midst of violent protests after the election, Mr. Morales' resignation came at the behest of the military and police forces of Bolivia. Consequently, this led to the perception, which is held by Morales himself, that the change in government was a de facto coup d'état. ¹⁴ The deaths that followed the election were largely a consequence of violent clashes between pro and anti-Morales supporters. However, most of the fatalities occurred after Morales' resignation, when the military was deployed to pacify the protesters, indicating a disproportionate use of force by Bolivia's police and armed forces. ¹⁵ In early December, the interim government appealed to Israel to help local authorities combat a purported rise in leftist terrorist activities. ¹⁶ Murillo claims that the interim government has deliberately sought out Israel's support because of their experience confronting "terrorists." ¹⁷	
Assessment	A reintroduction of accountability in the military demonstrates a degree of transparency and assuages fears of gross misconduct in the midst of civil turmoil. Requests for foreign military assistance to quell vague and unsubstantiated claims of seditious groups, however, will exacerbate the tension and distrust between pro and anti-Morales factions. Waging a campaign against ill-defined threats risks an increase in gratuitous hostilities and violations of citizens' rights.	

Governance and Political Instability		Moderate Risk (Rising)
Stabilizing Factors	The upcoming election has eased some of the ongoing public tensions. Despite the recent unrest surrounding the Morales's government and the Movimiento Al Socialismo party (MAS), the referendum result exposes a positive sign for Bolivian democracy. Political outcomes remain fluid and the government has shown that it will accept defeat. ¹⁸	

Destabilizing Factors	<p>Bolivia’s political climate remains uncertain. Since Morales’s resignation various other members of constitutionally designated staff have also resigned leaving many seats within government unfilled; the Vice President, President of the Senate, President of the Chamber of Deputies and First Vice President of the Senate. Jeanine Áñez, the former second Vice President of the Senate and face of the right-wing opposition, declared herself the Interim President until a new election is called.¹⁹ The appointment of Áñez, was done so without obtaining Parliamentary approval and was followed by further violent demonstrations resulting in dozens of deaths. An interim agreement to hold elections on 2 May, 2020 has eased some of these tensions. However since the declared elections, Áñez has stated her intention to run for presidency and Morales, despite his exile, will be running for Senate in the upcoming election. These announcements have stirred suspicion over the future of the Bolivian democracy.²⁰ Since the Morales government, many of the dominant political parties have collapsed to be replaced by short-lived opposition coalitions.²¹</p> <p>Corruption remains a significant hurdle in Bolivian politics as the Bolivian government offers immunity for officials involved in corruption cases; despite the court ruling this to be unconstitutional, laws governing officials are not enforced.²²</p> <p>Bolivia's political issues have delayed the renegotiation of two major industrial contracts; Gasbol Brazil and Gasbol Bolivia pipeline. Additionally, Áñez has severed ties with Venezuela and Cuba. The recent political disruption in Bolivia has caused for various trade unions and corporate disturbances that may have significant economic impact.</p>
Assessment	<p>Despite being a relatively stable country, Bolivia has recently experienced significant political turmoil with the Morales government. Corrupt government practices and lack of transparency have resulted in the public’s general lack of trust toward the majority government and suspicion surrounding the interim government and opposition parties. Though the Bolivian democracy remains fluid, it has been heavily challenged by public dissatisfaction.</p>

Population Heterogeneity		Moderate Risk (Rising)
Stabilizing Factors	<p>Bolivia is an ethnically diverse country comprised of 41% indigenous groups, which includes 36 recognized indigenous groups, such as the Aymara, Qechua, and Guarani.²³ The history of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples has been rife with colonial exploitation, disenfranchisement, and ill treatment. Morales was widely considered a champion for indigenous rights, as exemplified through: assigning 14 out of 16 cabinet seats to indigenous Bolivians, the inclusion of the indigenous Wiphala flag in political locations, and objecting to the crackdown on the indigenous coca plant.²⁴ Notably, Morales amended the Bolivian constitution, transforming Bolivia into a plurinational state that formally recognized the 36 indigenous languages of Bolivia²⁵ and outlined cultural, political, and juridical rights for indigenous groups.²⁶</p> <p>After protests regarding the lack of representation on interim President Áñez’s new cabinet, which featured zero indigenous members, Áñez added an indigenous woman as the Culture and Tourism Minister.²⁷ This limited attempt at inclusion may help ease tension between the new government and indigenous peoples.</p>	
Destabilizing Factors	<p>The introduction of interim President Jeanine Áñez, a far-right politician and conservative Catholic, has fueled ethnic conflict between indigenous groups and non-indigenous Bolivians.²⁸ Many of the indigenous-friendly policies and practices introduced by former President Morales have been reversed, including: the removal of the indigenous Wiphala flag from the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, the appearance of anti-Indigenous graffiti such as “Fuera Indios”, or “Out with Indians” on university walls and highways²⁹, and the reintroduction of religious symbols into political spaces, such as bibles and crucifixes.³⁰ Áñez has reportedly posted anti-indigenous tweets in the past, including “I want a Bolivia free of satanic indigenous rituals. The city is not for the indigenous. They should go to the mountains or plains”.³¹ Many indigenous Bolivians feel threatened by the Áñez administration, fearing that their rights enshrined by Morales’ policies may be revoked.³²</p>	
Assessment	<p>Tensions are high between indigenous and non-indigenous populations in Bolivia. Ethnic conflict and protests may erupt if the Áñez administration takes any anti-indigenous measures, such as removing Morales-era rights for indigenous Bolivians.</p>	

Demographic Stress		Low Risk (Stable)
Stabilizing Factors	Bolivia's urban population (% total of population) is fairly high: 69.4% as of 2018. ³³ The urban population growth rate (annual percentage), however, has been declining, rising only by 1.9% in 2018. ³⁴	
Destabilizing Factors	The population of Bolivians aged 0-14 (% of total) has been declining for decades, but remains high at 31% as of 2018. ³⁵ Approximately 50% of the population is under 25 years old. ³⁶ The population growth rate – 1.422% in 2018 – does not capture the notable increase in Bolivia's overall population between 2011 and 2018, in which it grew by more than 10%, from 10,212,954 to 11,353,142. ³⁷	
Assessment	Due to Bolivia's concentration of its population in urban centers, the country is vulnerable to mass demonstrations. In addition, their sizable population under 14 years old will require the state to invest more resources on education and social programs, which may be difficult if political unrest persists.	

International Linkages		Low Risk (Rising)
Stabilizing Factors	President Áñez has made recent efforts to bolster Bolivia's international presence by signing onto the Lima Accord; there are efforts to mend relations with Venezuela. Additionally, Bolivia has agreed to accept a US ambassador for the first time in 11 years in an attempt to strengthen the relationship and to “normalize understandings” with the United States. ³⁸	
Destabilizing Factors	Arturo Murillo, the newly appointed interior minister of Bolivia, has made accusations that Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro, has been financing subversive groups within Bolivia. This has resulted in the expulsion of Venezuelan and Cuban diplomats from the Country. ³⁹ Additionally, Cuban medical professionals have also been deported from the country in the midst of accusations of internal interference. ⁴⁰ Áñez has since pulled Bolivia from the Bolivarian Alliance with Cuba and Venezuela to strengthen ties with the United States and Israel. ⁴¹	
Assessment	Despite the recent disruption in political climate, and a stark shift in political ideology, Bolivia has maintained international partnerships with relative success. The joining of the Lima Accord and the renewed relations with the United States will likely result in greater US influence. It is uncertain as to whether the decision to sever ties with Venezuela and Cuba will prove to be an advantageous decision.	

Economic Performance		Low Risk (Rising)
Stabilizing Factors	The recent pacification agreement reached between interim President Áñez and protesters may help to alleviate political and economic uncertainty by reducing service disruption and eliminating the destruction of infrastructure. ⁴² The US\$100 million loan taken out with the Latin American Development Bank in October 2019 may help to mitigate the risk of popular discontent by maintaining public spending. ⁴³	
Destabilizing Factors	Bolivia is facing economic downturn. The dependence of Bolivia's economy and government revenue on exports to Argentina and Brazil makes it more vulnerable to shifts in commodity prices and to trading partners' economic and political troubles. As of 27 November 2019, Bolivian political turmoil has delayed the renegotiation of two contracts for the Gasbol Brazil-Bolivia pipeline which is expected to be re-negotiated in 2020. Due to missed delivery dates, Brazilian oil and gas regulator ANP is seeking a new carrier for the pipeline. Given that petroleum is Bolivia's top export, the loss of this major contract is expected to have a substantial impact on Bolivia's future economy. Additionally, Bolivia's sovereign credit rating has decreased to 'B+', reflecting the rapid and sustained erosion of external buffers and related macroeconomic risks, which have intensified amid recent political and social instability. ⁴⁴ Given that Brazil is a major trading partner consisting of 20% of Bolivia's export economy, this represents a major loss and threat. ⁴⁵	
Assessment	Bolivia was and remains one of the poorest countries in South America. However, between 2004 and 2014, the country saw exceptional economic growth, with GDP increasing at an average annual rate of 4.9%. ⁴⁶ There was also progress in reducing inequality, with moderate poverty decreasing from 59% to 39% and the GINI coefficient falling from 0.60 to 0.47. ⁴⁷ Since 2014, Bolivia has seen an	

	economic slowdown, with international reserves decreasing from US\$15.1 billion to US\$8 billion in mid-2019 and gross public debt increasing from 38% to 53% of GDP. ⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the present economic situation seems stable with annual GDP growth rates remaining at approximately 4.2% between 2015 and 2018. ⁴⁹
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Human Development		Low Risk (Stable)
Stabilizing Factors	Social welfare programs created by former President Evo Morales appear to have greatly improved development in Bolivia. Morales cut poverty rates in half from 59.9% in 2006, the beginning of his presidency, to 34.6% in 2017. ⁵⁰ Moreover, following the literacy program “Yes, I Can,” UNESCO declared Bolivia to be free of illiteracy in 2014. ⁵¹	
Destabilizing Factors	For human development indicators, Bolivia consistently ranks at or near the lowest position for Latin American states, including life expectancy (69 for men and 74 for women) ⁵² , infant mortality (22 per 1,000 live births) ⁵³ , maternal mortality (268 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births) ⁵⁴ , and HIV incidence rates (1.3 per 1,000 uninfected population ages 15-49) ⁵⁵ . Child labour is a significant issue in Bolivia, with children engaged in the mining, agriculture and commercial sexual exploitation industries. ⁵⁶ Rural and indigenous individuals are at a higher risk of poor health, education, and sanitation outcomes. ^{57 58} Moreover, with the recent rollback of social programs, including the deportation of Cuban doctors ⁵⁹ , there is a risk that development may worsen with the Áñez government, especially for the most vulnerable.	
Assessment	Human development, or lack thereof, presents a low risk for conflict in Bolivia. While Bolivia’s development indicators remain some of the poorest in the Latin American region, significant progress has been made in the last few years. Yet, should conflict emerge, health, education, and other development conditions may deteriorate, which could cause even greater resentment towards the government.	

Environmental Stress		Low Risk (Stable)
Destabilizing Factors	Deforestation represents one of the biggest environmental issues in Bolivia. Caused in part by the clearing of land for agricultural purposes and the international demand for tropical timber, it can lead to a cascade of other problems, including soil erosion, wildfires, desertification and a loss of biodiversity. ⁶⁰ These phenomena can in turn lead to a decrease in agricultural productivity, water contamination and damage to roads and houses. Potential natural disasters in Bolivia that could have a destabilizing impact include seasonal floods, wildfires, periodic droughts, and although unlikely, volcanic eruptions.	
Assessment	On the 2018 Environmental Performance Index, Bolivia ranks 92 nd out of 180 countries with a score of 55.98. ⁶¹ Its worst scores mostly stemmed from its intensities for total Co2 emissions, black carbon emissions and nitrogen oxide emissions. Negative impacts of Bolivia’s environmental performance include threats to social and economic structures, soil and water quality degradation, loss of plant biodiversity and decreasing agricultural productivity. This slow environmental degradation is currently stable, but requires future reassessment considering these phenomena imply long-term negative impacts.	

Scenarios	
Best Case Scenario	There are no protests against the interim government of Bolivia before, nor during the elections held in May 2020. Election results are accepted without protest and deemed legitimate by all parties involved and a democratic transition of the new government ensues. Throughout the process, indigenous rights are upheld by the interim government and the newly elected government.
Worst Case Scenario	Protests lead to violent conflict and military involvement leads to repression. Civil war breaks out between pro-Morales and anti-Morales groups, potentially leading to foreign intervention by neighbouring states or the U.S.
Most Likely Scenario	Suspicion of future political involvement by both Evo Morales and Jeanine Áñez, and social tensions prevail. Protests break out prior to, during, and perhaps after the May 3rd 2020 national elections. The electoral victors’ legitimacy is questioned by one or both sides.

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