



Center for Economic and Policy Research - Andean Information Network Press Release

The End of an Era: Bolivia Veers Right as Coup “President” Freed Ahead of Massacre Anniversary

November 15 will mark the sixth anniversary of the Sacaba massacre, when Bolivian security forces killed 11 unarmed Indigenous protesters and injured and tortured over a hundred others, violently repressing a peaceful march in the days following the 2019 coup that forced President Evo Morales into exile. The anniversary comes amid a seismic political shift that cements impunity for those responsible for the post-coup violence.

On November 8, veteran rightwing politician Rodrigo Paz Pereira assumed office as the country’s president, ending nearly two decades of progressive rule (interrupted for one year by the 2019 coup) under the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party. His inauguration marks a sharp and likely enduring right turn in Bolivian politics, highlighted by a Supreme Court decision just days earlier to [annul](#) the 10-year prison sentence of de facto president Jeanine Añez, convicted for her role in enabling the coup.

Añez had also faced criminal charges for [authorizing](#) the Sacaba and Senkata massacres in the days after she took office, but those cases were [annulled](#) in September as well. Añez’s release on November 6 was the latest in a series of politically-motivated judicial rulings in the wake of the victory of rightwing forces in the August 17 first round of this year’s general elections. The rulings also cleared her former cabinet secretaries, close allies, and security forces of charges related to their involvement in the coup. Paz’s transition team immediately [invited her](#) to his inauguration.

She assumed power in 2019 following a [coup backed](#) by the Trump administration and the Organization of American States (OAS). That year, the OAS — while monitoring the presidential elections — alleged through a series of reports based on unofficial preliminary vote counts that massive electoral fraud had occurred. Although [CEPR researchers](#) and other [independent analysts](#) debunked these claims, the Bolivian right and the military used them as a pretext to force incumbent president Evo Morales from office, months before his term was set to end, despite his narrow victory in the elections.

Áñez’s year in power was characterized by the persecution of union leaders, MAS members, journalists, and other perceived opponents, and by the bloody repression of Indigenous protesters in coordination with right-wing paramilitaries. Her policies dismantled many of the progressive social and economic reforms of the Morales era — which had contributed to robust

economic growth, poverty reduction, and the expansion of Indigenous rights — and laid the groundwork for Bolivia's current economic crisis. According to a [CEPR study](#) of Bolivia's post-coup economy, Añez's pre-COVID-19 austerity measures had already triggered a sharp economic slowdown, and her inadequate fiscal policies, corruption, and repressive pandemic response worsened the economic and health impacts of the pandemic.

Bolivia held elections again in 2020, with Luis Arce, Morales's former economy minister, winning on the MAS ticket. Under Arce, Bolivia's justice system charged Añez for both ongoing massacre cases and tried her for a series of illegal actions surrounding the coup. His government also faced opposition attacks, credible [corruption allegations](#), and growing internal party tensions amid a continuing economic downturn. MAS split into three factions, paralyzing Congress and sparking frequent protests by Morales supporters, which were met with repression. As the economy deteriorated, Arce and his allies in the judiciary blocked Morales's bid for a return to office, leaving many Bolivians disillusioned and paving the way for Paz's rise.

The son of a former president, Paz won the elections by presenting himself as a moderate, promising "capitalism for all." He also ran alongside a conservative, TikTok-famous former police officer and anti-corruption campaigner who mobilized strong grassroots support. Paz inherits a profound political, social, and economic crisis, with weak institutions vulnerable to political interference, a deeply polarized and unequal society, and high inflation coupled with a shortage of US dollar reserves, which have contributed to fuel shortages and undermined the government's ability to provide subsidies underpinning Bolivia's social safety net.

Paz's party now controls the largest bloc in the legislature, and alliances with two other conservative parties could give him a supermajority — enough to block any congressional trial of Añez and others involved in the post-coup violent repression. Despite his campaign rhetoric of "renewal," his cabinet includes former ministers from his father's administration and a family member. And although he claimed he would eliminate the Justice Ministry, he appointed his vice president's personal lawyer, [alleged to have a bribery conviction](#), as minister. Paz also campaigned against turning to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but his government [may strike](#) a deal with the Fund by March.

On the international stage, Paz has signaled an intent to strengthen ties with prominent members of the region's far right. He invited Argentine President [Javier Milei](#) and Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele to his inauguration, even asking Bukele to [advise](#) him on "prison reform." He quickly restored full diplomatic relations with [Israel's Netanyahu government](#) and the [US administration](#) — strained under Morales and Arce — [met](#) with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and announced the [return](#) of the US Drug Enforcement Administration to Bolivia, along with the [elimination](#) of entry visas for US citizens. At the request of the US, Paz will grant permission for [Elon Musk's Starlink](#) internet company to operate in the country.

Significant questions surround President Paz's policy agenda. His administration has not clarified how it will manage sensitive economic issues, such as reducing fuel subsidies or natural resource extraction — particularly of Bolivia's vast lithium reserves, the largest in the

world. It is also unclear whether his government will continue to allow impunity for the Sacaba and Senkata massacres and other serious human rights violations, or whether it will implement the recommendations of the [Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts \(GIEI\)](#) for justice and integral reparations for the victims of coup violence, including the massacres. Moreover, [statements](#) such as “freedom is conditioned; those who don’t contribute should beware,” combined with his use of the slogan “[God, Family, and Fatherland](#)”— a phrase associated historically with [fascist movements](#) — raise concerns about the potential direction of his presidency.

Further Reading:

[Impunity and a Splintered MAS pave the way for the Right’s Return in Bolivia](#), NACLA, October 2025

[Failed Coup in Bolivia: Army Chief Arrested After Leading Troops in Attack on Government Palace](#), Democracy Now, June 2024

[OAS Continues to Dodge Accountability for Actions in the 2019 Bolivian Election](#), CEPR, August 2022

[Biden Bungles Bolivia](#), NACLA, June 2022

[New Report on Human Rights Violations in Bolivia in 2019 Sheds Light on the Role of the OAS](#), CEPR, August 2021

[Report on the Sacaba and Senkata Massacres](#), AIN, May 2021

[Observing the Observers: The OAS in the 2019 Bolivian Elections](#), CEPR, March 2020