

# President Arce meets with Eva Copa and Ponchos Rojos in response to Bolivian coup threat

Via [Contrahegemonía](#)

On August 14, Bolivian President Luis Arce and the mayor of El Alto, Eva Copa, met for the first time after the mayor's expulsion from the MAS, her victory in El Alto with 70% of the vote, and her consolidation on the political scene as an important young Aymara leader. The meeting also took place after former president Evo Morales accused her of being a "traitor", for which the mayor demanded that he provide proof and pointed out that the attack was intended to hide the MAS' defeat in the sub-national elections last March.

Eva Copa received Luis Arce in her stronghold, El Alto, the hard core of indigenous resistance in the country. El Alto is Bolivia's second most populous city and first to La Paz, and the purpose of the meeting was to inaugurate the massive Covid-19 vaccination campaign as part of a joint effort between the national government and El Alto's city government. The city is key in the history of Bolivia's indigenous struggle and a protagonist in the "gas war" and resistance to the 2019 coup.

The mayor supported the administration of Luis Arce in a socio-political context of a destabilizing offensive with continuous demonstrations by the ultra-right: "The people of El Alto will not allow our government to be destabilized because here in El Alto our president Luis Arce won with 77.7%, one of the cities that got the highest percentage, so that today they are the government. And just as we guaranteed

his triumph, we will guarantee that he will complete it because they will work for our people.”

Luis Arce was welcomed by a crowd of people from El Alto who shouted: “Lucho, brother, El Alto is with you”, to which the president replied: “If El Alto is with Lucho, Lucho is with El Alto” (...) “Our brothers from El Alto are not alone, here is the national government working so that they can enjoy a massive vaccination”.

Meanwhile, on August 26, another important meeting was held. President Luis Arce and Vice President David Choquehuanca hosted the Ponchos Rojos from the province of Omasuyos in La Paz at the government house, which also supported the government. The Ponchos Rojos were the main allies of indigenous leader Felipe Quispe “El Mallku”, and after his death supported his son Santos Quispe of “Adelante Pueblo Unido” (APU) as governor of La Paz, as well as Eva Copa of “Renueva El Alto”.

Both Eva Copa’s and Ponchos Rojos’ sectors are fierce critics of Bolivia’s traditional, colonial left, composed of the so-called “intellectual, white, middle-class” sector of the MAS, who are part of Evo Morales’ “entourage.” They are accused of closing the way to new indigenous leaderships, especially indigenous women, and of using them as ladders to access political power at the expense of their struggle. These accusations coincide with those coming from the indigenous wing within the MAS.

Eva Copa’s support for Luis Arce is very important to cushion a destabilizing onslaught from the ultra-right, because if Eva Copa decides not to mobilize her people in El Alto in the face of a new coup attempt, as she stated some time ago, the situation would be uncertain to say the least. At the same time, the support of the Ponchos Rojos, highly respected within the indigenous world in Bolivia, is also important.

The meeting between Luis Arce, Eva Copa and Ponchos Rojos reveals a strategic and intelligent move by Luis Arce and David Choquehunaca in the midst of a delicate political and social context in the country. Both are politicians who maintain a highly positive image, generate “unity” and have managed to unite sectors that other figures could not achieve, as in the case of Eva Copa and the Ponchos Rojos. In the last few hours, MAS deputy Juanito Ángulo even declared: “MAS is broad and will not close if Eva Copa wants to come back”. To which Eva Copa declared, “Never again with MAS, I have other projects”.

### **Main factors that reveal the complex socio-political context in Bolivia**

1-The sector of society that claims that there was “electoral fraud” in 2019: Recently the Public Ministry closed the “electoral fraud” case based on an audit by the University of Salamanca. This provoked demonstrations against the closure of the case called by the Pro Santa Cruz Committee and CONADE (National Committee for the Defense of Democracy), which promoted the 2019 coup. These committees maintain that this “opens the way for the presidential candidacy of Evo Morales in 2025.”

On the other hand, the president of the Bolivian Assembly of Human Rights (APDHB) demands that the investigation of Jeanine Áñez be carried out in freedom. Other demands include the release of some of the detainees and an end to “political persecution.” After the report was presented by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI), Áñez’s daughter, along with the right wing, accepted the investigation of the de facto former president, but under the same conditions as Evo Morales, as they believe that by stating in the report that “human rights were violated from September to December 2019,” former president Evo Morales should also be investigated.

The “fraud” narrative continues to be defined by the OAS as in 2019. The same 23 right-wing former heads of state who demanded that Evo Morales not be re-elected in 2019, following Añez’s suicide attempt, held Luis Arce responsible for Añez’s “life and personal integrity.”

Demonstrations are taking place in different parts of the country: Santa Cruz, La Paz and Cochabamba, and are growing in the country. And with clashes between “masistas” and “pititas” (supporters of the coup plotters) and with some people injured, as in the case of the demonstrations near the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA) and the Miraflores prison, where Añez is being held. In addition, there was a strike by women prisoners to demand better conditions inside the prison and for protesters from both sides to leave.

2- The sector of society that maintains that there has been a “coup d’état”: They demand that Jeanine Añez remain in prison while her trial continues, as they warn that she is a flight risk. The Supreme Court of Justice has sent the indictment to Parliament to authorize a trial of responsibility, which is only possible with the opposition’s agreement, as it requires two-thirds of the votes and the MAS does not have the necessary special majority. The opposition in favor of the coups has conditioned its positive vote to a judicial reform that guarantees a “neutral justice” based on the GIEI report.

3- The sector that argues that these coup/fraud narratives only polarize society: they argue that both poles respond to personal political interests and not to a real quest for justice. On the one hand, the “fraud” case, which has been closed, responds to the interests of the ultra-right, and on the other hand, the “coup” case responds to “cleaning up the image of Evo and his entourage.” For this sector, it is necessary to differentiate the “coup d’état” case, which has former President Evo Morales, former Vice President Alvaro Linera, former Senate President Adriana Salvatierra and former President of the Deputies Víctor Borda as victims, from the

cases of the “Senkata and Sacaba massacres”, which point to the “real victims”. These are different cases, with different crimes and different victims, with different times and different treatments in the media.

4- The coup plotters are officials in the metropolitan axis of the country: Fernando Camacho is governor of Santa Cruz, Iván Arias, former de facto minister, is mayor of La Paz, Manfred Reyes Villa is mayor of Cochabamba. Although the latter has played the role of “democrat” with the aim of projecting himself as a “moderate” candidate for the presidency of the country in 2025, his past condemns him as leader of the so-called “Media Luna”, from where the 2008 coup attempt was promoted.

5- The MAS-IPSP split: The ultra-right knows this fight in detail, they take advantage of it and strengthen it. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the MAS. They know the relationships between the poles of power: 1- The government of Luis Arce and David Choquehuanca, 2- Evo Morales (MAS president) and his “entourage”, 3- The unity pact, 4- The federation of Bolivian workers (COB).

6-The structure of the coup is intact within the state: this situation was fundamental during the 2019 coup for intelligence purposes. Every day, people who work in the state and belong to the de facto government are denounced through social networks, including some who were recently appointed. No one takes responsibility for this. A paradigmatic case is the case of the president of Yacimientos de Litio Boliviano (YLB), who was part of the former de facto government of Añez, which was the reason why he was not recognized and the lithium plant at the Uyuni salt flats was taken over.

7- Replacement of the leadership of the “Resistance Unity Pact”: These are the leaders who were part of it during the 2019 coup. With their virtues and flaws, they have the experience of the struggle to resist the coup and its

subsequent triumph, recovering democracy. Some claim that they have been “isolated and slandered.” One example is that of Segundina Flores, former leader of the Confederation of Indigenous Women Bartolina Sisa of Bolivia, who denounced “Evo’s entourage” for being behind his inexplicable departure from the organization, despite his leadership role during the coup, and for being part of the small group that accompanied Evo Morales when he was left alone during the coup, since his entire “entourage” had left the country before the former president himself. She added that they placed another woman accepted by “Evo’s entourage”. She is currently the victim of a systematic smear campaign, as a photo was released by portals linked to “Evo’s entourage.” In the photo Segundina shakes hands with coup leader Arturo Murillo during the agreement to end conflicts in 2019, in which the unity pact and the Bolivian workers’ center (COB) participated.

8- A Bolivian workers’ center (COB) at odds with Evo Morales’ “entourage”: the COB did not participate in the MAS Congress, nor in the recent national meeting called by the former president, because it is at odds with his “entourage”.