

# *Bolivian presidential elections give Evo Morales the lead, awaiting final results*

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La Paz, October 21 (RHC)-- Bolivians voted in elections on Sunday to decide whether to extend the presidency of Evo Morales amid a rise in right-wing governments in the region that have been facing major protests in neighboring Chile, Ecuador and Argentina over harsh austerity measures.

The preliminary vote count Sunday night gave Evo Morales a lead with 45.28 percent of the ballots.

Morales needs 40 percent of the vote and a 10-point lead to win outright. Although final results have not yet come in, it appears that another round of voting will need to take place now between Evo Morales and his closest opponent, Carlos Mesa, who garnered 38.16 of the votes. The second round would take place on December 15th.

Morales, whose campaign slogan is "Secure Future," has fanned fears that opposition candidate Carlos Mesa would seek support from the International Monetary Fund, and warned about the recent unrest in Ecuador and Argentina over unpopular loan deals with the IMF.

Evo, a former union leader for coca growers, became Bolivia's first Indigenous president in 2006. He has overseen a long stretch of political and economic stability for Bolivia, a landlocked country of 11 million

people.

"I support Evo because I want a stable economy," said Elsa Lima, 55, who sells sweets from a kiosk in the capital La Paz. "Otherwise everything will spin out of control and there will be crisis."

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