

Voting ends in Bolivia's presidential elections, ballot counting begins



La Paz, October 20 (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.

Morales, widely known as just "Evo," is the favorite to win, with most polls showing as scoring a first-round victory, while some opposition-backed surveys show him winning but with less support.

Morales, 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."

Morales needs 40 percent of ballots and a 10-point lead to win outright on Sunday. Polls opened at 8:00 am local time and closed eight hours later at 4:00 p.m. local time. The next president will govern from

2020-2025.

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.

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