

The movement to stop Bolivia's President Evo Morales

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Disregard for the constitution has provoked a backlash



UNLIKE OTHER Latin American presidents with authoritarian leanings, Evo Morales has dominated his country less through coercion than through consent. Bolivia's economy has grown by an average of nearly 5% a year during his 13 years in power, double the Latin American average. Although it remains South America's poorest country, extreme poverty has fallen by more than half, according to the World Bank. Indigenous and mestizo Bolivians, a majority of the population, have made social and economic progress under the first president with indigenous roots. In 2017 he celebrated those achievements by building a museum in his home town whose collection features portraits of himself.

Mr Morales, a former leader of a coca-growers' union, has won three elections fairly and by large margins. He hopes to win a fourth in October. But his attempts to prolong his presidency have become increasingly high-handed. He has tightened his hold over the supposedly independent electoral commission. The government has leaned on the press, for example by withdrawing advertising from critical newspapers. Although Mr Morales might win a fair election in October, many Bolivians are worried that he will hold on to office whatever the vote. That fear has provoked a backlash, which has given heart to a divided opposition.