

Evo Morales, President of Bolivia: Wearing Bolivia  
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Summary by Haley Stab

Alexi Arriaran researched the president of Bolivia and the impact his wardrobe has on Bolivia. Evo Morales is the President of Bolivia. He was born in 1959, and his parents were poor indigenous Aymara cocoa leaf growers. After high school he joined the military, and when he was done he worked for his family on their farm. Morales began his climb to presidency when he started the Movimiento Al Socialismo. This was a movement towards socialism, and helped Morales become noticed in politics. In 1995 he won a legislative seat, and ten years later he became the first indigenous president of Bolivia.

Morales is often seen in photos wearing a unique striped sweater from the Punto Blanco company. Known as the ‘symbol of the president’ there was an increase in sales in the sweater from citizens of Bolivia. In 2006, eight of the Punto Blanco stores were selling up to 300 sweaters a day. Morales wore this popular sweater during many meet and greets with political figures in other countries. He was photographed wearing the sweater when he met Chinese President Ho Jintao, then again when meeting Spain’s King Juan Carlos, and again when he met African leader Thabo Mbeki. He wore this sweater proudly, making a statement that you can be a powerful leader without dressing in a suit. *The New York Times* stated that his style was an act of sincerity, praising him for not dressing as someone he is not. Morales did not need to be seen in an Armani suit to be President of Bolivia and have respect from his country. While he was doing this to make a statement, he also received backlash about not dressing appropriately, and politicians in Spain implied that his sweater was cheap.

As a result of the negative comments about his sweater, Morales adopted a blazer that was designed for his style. The blazer had a Bolivian flare with an embroidered awayu design, without any buttons or collar. Morales continues to encourage people to “wear Bolivia” through his clothing. Whenever he meets with another world leader or celebrities he gifts them a poncho featuring the colors and designs of Bolivian dress. Morales aims to spread the Bolivian culture beyond the country’s borders, and encourages people that visit Bolivia to wear Bolivia.