



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# Enabling Environment Snapshot

Bolivia

June 2025

## Context

In Bolivia, respect for and guarantee of fundamental freedoms face growing structural challenges in an electoral context marked by high social conflict and political-institutional tensions. Between January and April 2025, [174 violations](#) of democratic institutions, fundamental freedoms and the right to defend human rights have been recorded. The national elections and the convergence of multiple structural crises are the main catalysts for these violations.

This scenario is exacerbated by a restrictive regulatory environment for civil society organisations (CSOs), characterised by administrative obstacles, arbitrary delays in legal proceedings and discourse that delegitimises their work. Although there have been some specific advances, such as the formalisation of the statutes of the [La Paz Journalists' Association](#), restrictions that hinder the exercise of the right to freedom of association remain. Added to this, there is an uncertain outlook in terms of funding, aggravated by the shift in international cooperation, such as the freezing of USAID funds, which could weaken the actions of multiple CSOs that, [although they do not receive resources directly from this U.S. entity](#), they do so through other organisations that operate in the country that depend on this financing.

The state has also shown little willingness to institutionalise mechanisms for civil society participation in public policy formulation. Although there are isolated examples of coordination, the political climate remains unfavourable for the full exercise of fundamental freedoms, fuelled by official narratives that tend to discredit critical actors.

**Commented [ELA1]:** Were national organizations not receiving funding from USAID? only international?

**Commented [RH2R1]:** Yes, since its expulsion in 2013, USAID has stopped financing projects in Bolivia, however, resources from this entity reach the country through other international organizations. I added a context link.

## 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

According to the [UNITAS Observatory of Human Rights Defenders](#), as of 30 April 2025, 174 violations of fundamental freedoms have been recorded in Bolivia. Freedom of the press has been particularly affected, with 39 violations, representing 22% of the total. Journalists and the media have been the main targets of threats, impediments to access to information, criminalisation, and physical and verbal attacks in contexts of social and electoral conflict.

According to the tally of violence generated by electoral protests and the multiple crises facing the country, a total of 33 violations of journalistic work have been identified between January and June 2025, including attacks [on cameraman Marco Jiménez of Channel F10](#), censorship and harassment of [international correspondents during an interview with Evo Morales](#), [threats to a journalist in Yapacaní](#), where protests are taking place over the economic crisis, and [systematic attacks on journalists at roadblocks](#) and [demonstrations](#).

Freedom of expression has also faced [restrictions during the first four months of 2025](#), with at least 16 violations recorded, mostly in the context of electoral unrest. Likewise, 10 violations of the right to peaceful assembly and protest have been documented, with the excessive use of force by police officers—in operations to deter or prevent demonstrations—being the predominant cause. Among the most relevant cases are the [protests led by urban teachers](#) in the city of La Paz and the blockades organised by the [public transport sector](#), which demanded structural responses to inflation and fuel shortages.

## 2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

The country's legal framework [does not facilitate the registration and operation of civil society organisations](#), primarily because these processes are ["complex, lengthy, costly and often subject to arbitrary decisions by public officials."](#) An example of this was the failure to approve the statutes of one of the country's most important journalists' associations: the La Paz Journalists' Association (APLP). In May this year, after a three-year wait, the Autonomous Departmental Government of La Paz issued the notarised certificate approving the update and modification of the APLP's Organic Statute and Internal Regulations.

Although the outcome was positive in this case, the bureaucracy and waiting times involved in obtaining the documents that grant legal status to CSOs are a constant problem that continues to violate the right of association. [Obstacles in obtaining legal status for an organisation of people with cancer](#) from the Vice-Ministry of Public Investment and External Financing or the [division of an organisation of footballers unionised by private actors](#) or [neighbourhood organisations](#), still show that, in addition to stumbling over the legal processing of the organisation, the dismantling and constant attack on legitimate organisations remains a latent problem that affects the enabling environment for CSOs in Bolivia.

## 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

In the [National Consultation on an Enabling Environment](#) for CSOs conducted by UNITAS in 2024, it was identified that financial support from development partners to civil society organisations "has decreased in terms of amounts, predictability and duration, making it difficult for CSOs to make a sustained commitment to development and the promotion and defence of rights."

Adding to this context, in January 2025, US President Donald Trump [signed an executive order freezing funds](#) from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This decision left the future of key programmes for Latin America uncertain.

In Bolivia, USAID closed its operations on 30 September 2013 after being [expelled by the government of Evo Morales](#). However, it did provide sporadic assistance, for example during the Covid-19 pandemic, with [the delivery of ventilators](#). An article by KAS shows that [USAID distributed \\$600,000 to Bolivia in 2023](#).

The dismantling of USAID could have indirect effects on international cooperation in Bolivia, as several international NGOs operating in the country depend on these funds. This situation could weaken their operational capacity and limit their action. Together with restrictive regulations, these decisions by development partners do not facilitate access to sustainable resources for CSOs in Bolivia.

## 4. State openness and responsiveness

Interaction between civil society and the State in Bolivia remains weak and fragmented. The limited inclusion of CSOs in consultation processes for the design, planning and monitoring of public and development policies persists. However, some areas for coordination and articulation have been identified, particularly in the field of human rights, where certain CSOs have established [collaborative working relationships with institutions such as the](#)

[Ombudsman's Office](#), through the [signing of agreements](#) and joint training and advocacy actions .

Likewise, a technical exchange process has been established with the Ministry of Rural Development and Land, which includes the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs), with the aim of reviewing and proposing adjustments to Ministerial Resolution 060—which approves the Regulations for the Evaluation and Monitoring of Programmes and/or Projects Executed with Donation Resources, National or International Cooperation—in response to observations made by CSOs, [which considered it restrictive for the freedom of association](#). This joint review process has yielded significant results, as the regulation has been amended to a large extent in response to the concerns expressed.

These efforts, although punctual, demonstrate the possibility of generating mechanisms for institutional dialogue, even in a general context of low and impermanent participation.

The approval of [the bill on access to public information in the Senate](#) seemed a positive sign for progress on legislation that would enable this right to be operationalised through specific procedures for requesting and receiving information. However, its stagnation in the Chamber of Deputies shows a lack of political interest in achieving its approval and subsequent referral to the Executive.

## 5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Electoral conflicts in Bolivia have given rise to narratives that negatively affect the enabling environment, including [stigmatising discourses and censorship practices](#). For example, national executive authorities have issued [disparaging statements against opposition candidates](#) and have even [censored public figures](#). This can create a climate of hostility and self-censorship that may cause CSOs to avoid speaking out on sensitive issues for fear of reprisals.

In the CSO sphere, following the announcement of the suspension of USAID cooperation, the newspaper [La Razón conducted an investigation](#) that questions the Foundation for Journalism and the National Press Association for their receipt of US funding, and accountability in the use of these funds. Through the use of terms and phrases such as "unclear and reluctant", "inappropriate and unprofessional tone", "opaque transparency", "lack of institutional rigour" and "unwilling or unable to be accountable", it contributes to a narrative of suspicion and mistrust against these organisations.

## 6. Access to a secure digital environment

The digital environment in Bolivia is quite complicated for journalists. According to data from the UNITAS Observatory of Human Rights Defenders, between January and April of this year, there have been [three cases of cyberbullying](#) against journalists for their reporting, characterised by [death threats](#), [intimidation](#) and [attacks on specific accounts](#).

With regard to disinformation, a report by Bolivia Verifica notes that it has [increased in the run-up to the national elections](#), mainly through false or manipulated polls, false statements attributed to pre-candidates, false alliances and presidential tickets, false announcements about the suspension of the electoral process, and others.

These actions and threats can inhibit a safe digital environment for civil society organisations, especially if there are no clear signals from the state to curb digital violence and disinformation campaigns.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The approach of the 17 August national elections in Bolivia poses significant challenges for the enabling environment for civil society. The worsening of political tensions may result in increased restrictions on fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, assembly and association. This situation may lead to limitations on CSOs, as it reduces the scope for organising forums, campaigns or activities related to the elections.

The weakening of the principles of impartiality and institutional independence, the use of justice as a tool to obstruct the electoral process and the harassment of critical voices undermine the rule of law and weaken democracy, creating a climate of fear and insecurity that restricts fundamental freedoms such as association, peaceful assembly and expression. These practices reduce civil society's ability to influence public policy, weaken mechanisms for the protection and enforcement of rights, and deepen polarisation and social mistrust, thereby narrowing civic space and undermining the enabling environment for its work.

However, this context also opens up opportunities to strengthen coordination among civil society actors, highlight violations, and demand guarantees for a free and safe civic environment.

In this regard, it is recommended that the State: guarantee that CSOs can meet, associate and express themselves without arbitrary restrictions; refrain from using the justice system to intimidate or discredit critical actors; and ensure effective channels for reporting and protection against attacks.

And to civil society: to strengthen networks and alliances to collectively defend freedom of association and expression; to document and disseminate cases of harassment; and to maintain public campaigns demanding respect for these rights during the electoral process.

*This publication was funded/co-funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.*



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

