



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Bolivia

October 2025

Context

In Bolivia, the enabling environment for civil society organisations (CSOs) is strained by various factors that limit the full development of civil society. Particularly, the respect for and protection of fundamental freedoms is affected by frequent violations of freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Between January and August, [120 violations of press freedom and 38 violations of freedom of expression](#) were documented, with attacks on journalists ranging from verbal and physical violence to censorship and threats. Added to this is the instrumentalization of the justice system in the context of this year's general elections, which has jeopardised the autonomy of the Electoral Body and created uncertainty in the electoral process. This has therefore had a significant impact on civil society.

The elections, held on 17 August, and the second round on 19 October, have been affected by the instrumentalization of the justice system. Particularly, decisions by departmental constitutional courts have jeopardised the national elections on more than one occasion. Two examples are: [the ruling of the Constitutional Chamber of Beni](#), which admitted an action for compliance against the Supreme Electoral Tribunal requesting the cancellation of the legal status of the Third System Movement (MTS); and the [resolution of the Fourth Constitutional Chamber of La Paz](#), which annulled the MTS national congress for alleged violation of political rights. Although these actions did not succeed, they reflected an instrumentalization of the courts for political aims, compromising the autonomy of the Electoral Tribunal and the effective conduct of the electoral process.

In addition, the country is facing multiple deepening crises. In 2025, the economic crisis has been further exacerbated by a shortage of dollars and rising prices for basic household goods. It has also caused problems in the acquisition of subsidised petrol and diesel, leading not only to long queues at gas stations, but also to the paralysis of production in eastern Bolivia. The social crisis, caused by demonstrations and protests over the lack of dollars and fuel, and the institutional crisis, caused by government neglect of the demands of various sectors of the population and a consequential loss of confidence in government, have complicated the environment in which civil society organisations operate.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

The degree of vulnerability faced by journalists and media workers in Bolivia has intensified due to the electoral scenario (Bolivia held general elections on 17 August and a run-off between Jorge Tuto Quiroga, of the Libre group, and Rodrigo Paz, of the Christian Democratic Party, on 19 October, with the latter winning) and the multiple crises in the country. According to the UNITAS Human Rights Defenders Observatory, between January and August, [120 violations](#) of freedom of expression against journalists were identified. These were characterised by verbal and physical violence, stigmatisation, gender-based violence, and threats and censorship against journalistic work. [The work of journalists has been increasingly threatened by electoral polarisation and the hostility of candidates, groups or party activists.](#) These have hindered access to and dissemination of information through stigmatising discourse against journalists and attacks on journalists covering the elections. This situation not only highlights the vulnerability of the journalism sector, but also the limitations on access to public information, pluralistic debate, and free expression.

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](#)".

In May 2025, two new public complaints were filed regarding obstruction of the process of obtaining legal status: one from the [Association of People with Cancer and their Families](#) and another from the [Bolivian Palliative Care Alliance Association](#), which have experienced repeated delays since 2020 in the procedures before the Vice-Ministry of Public Investment and External Financing. Similarly, the director of the organisation Internet Bolivia Foundation revealed that, in September 2025, it managed to obtain legal status from the Vice-Ministry of Autonomies after eight years of paperwork. This and other cases reported in previous reports show the risk to freedom of association and, above all, to the functioning and self-determination of civil society organisations.

Although the outcome was positive in this case, the bureaucracy and waiting times involved in obtaining the documents that grant CSOs legal status are a constant factor that continues to undermine the right to association. Cases such as the [division of a footballers' union by private actors](#) or [neighbourhood organisations](#) show that, in addition to encountering legal obstacles to the organisation's registration, the dismantling of and constant attack on legitimate organisations remain latent problems that affect the enabling environment for CSOs in Bolivia.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

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

Restrictions on funding are not limited to international cooperation but also observed in funding from government sources. For example, in September 2025, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB), the state oil company, [decided to cancel](#) one of these government-allocated funds for CSOs or academia. The fund, granted to the Institute of Mechanical and Electromechanical Research at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés for its research into fuel quality, was abruptly suspended at a time when it focused on fuel imported by the state – a practice affected by the economic crisis and dollar shortages.

The example highlights a deeper problem: the discretionary nature with which access to and sustainability of state funds are managed. This practice not only impacts the autonomy of academia, a key player in rigorous knowledge production and a fundamental part of Bolivian civil society, it also limits the research and monitoring work carried out by civil society organisations, which are essential for guaranteeing access to data and evidence. Furthermore, it subjects both CSOs and academic institutions to implicit conditions discouraging critical analysis or findings that may make public entities uncomfortable. This form of self-censorship weakens transparency, informed participation, and the collective capacity to demand improvements in public policy.

4. State openness and responsiveness

Interaction between civil society and the State in Bolivia remains weak and fragmented. The inclusion of CSOs in consultation processes for the design, planning, and monitoring of public and development policies remains limited. However, some areas of coordination and dialogue have been identified. Especially in the field of human rights, certain CSOs have established [collaborative working relationships with institutions such as the Ombudsman's Office](#), as evidenced by the [signing of agreements](#) and joint training and advocacy actions. This joint effort to reduce social conflict and promote informed voting in the context of the national elections, reflects not only an openness of working together with CSOs but also led to more positive discourses on CSOs.

Likewise, a technical exchange process between CSOs and the Ministry of Rural Development and Land has been established. The aim of this exchange is to review and propose 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. This review happened in response to CSO observations [finding the Resolution to be restrictive of freedom of association](#) and has yielded important results, as the regulation has since been modified to a large extent.

These efforts, although specific, demonstrate the possibility of generating mechanisms for institutional dialogue, even in a broader context of low and permanent systematic dialogue.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Electoral conflicts in Bolivia have given rise to narratives that have a negative impact on the enabling environment, including stigmatising discourse and censorship practices. For example, national executive authorities have issued [disparaging statements against opposition candidates](#) and have [censored public figures](#).

Negative discourses were also directed at fact checkers and the media. In September, after two fact checkers, Chequea Bolivia and Bolivia Verifica—the latter born out of the work of the Foundation for Journalism—authenticated a racist message from the account of Juan Pablo Velasco, the vice-presidential candidate of the Alianza Libre, both initiatives [suffered a series of attacks and stigmatisation](#) by actors linked to this political organisation. Such rhetoric can create a climate of hostility against CSOs and encourages self-censorship of sensitive issues for fear of reprisals.

In contrast, the [collaborative working relationships](#) that civil society organisations have established [with institutions such as the Ombudsman's Office](#) had a positive impact on public discourses. The collaboration aims to combat misinformation in the electoral context and reduce social conflict, which not only promises to have a positive impact on the broader public discourse, but also highlights the Ombudsman's perception of civil society as a constructive partner in promoting informed voting and a strategic actor in curbing any type of violence in the electoral context.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

The digital environment in Bolivia is considered complicated for journalists. According to data from the UNITAS Observatory of Human Rights Defenders, between January and August 2025, there have been four [cases of cyberbullying](#) against journalists, characterised by [death threats](#), [intimidation](#), and [attacks on specific accounts](#). In addition, in August there was a case of cyberbullying against presidential candidate Andrónico Rodríguez, who suffered [a cyberattack on his official website](#).

The European Union Election Observation Mission, in its [preliminary report](#) on the national elections, states that the national elections were affected by increasingly sophisticated disinformation related to false polls, alleged failures in the electoral computer system, and allegations of collusion within the Supreme Electoral Tribunal to alter the election results.

These actions and threats can inhibit a secure 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

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