



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# **Enabling Environment Snapshot**

**Bolivia**

**February 2026**

## Context

Period covered by the report: This snapshot covers the period November 2025 – February 2026

Over the last six months, Bolivia has undergone a period of transition marked by structural problems and growing institutional tension following the change of government. The economic crisis—characterised by a shortage of US dollars, a fiscal deficit and falling gas revenues—generated pressures of various kinds and exacerbated governance difficulties. The absence of a parliamentary majority prompted the Executive to resort frequently to the use of decrees, which deepened the rift with certain sectors of civil society. At the same time, a fragmentation of party hegemony became evident, a phenomenon which, despite the uncertainty, opens up space for new dialogue and consensus.

Initially, the legislature provided temporary political backing to the executive, driven by the economic crisis and the need for governance. This support gradually weakened as time went on. In the second month of the administration, the presidential cabinet issued Supreme Decree 5503, [which drastically reduced the hydrocarbon subsidy. This measure, which had been in place for over 20 years, proposed a package of other actions that were criticised by various social sectors for contravening the provisions of the Constitution.](#) Although a process of dialogue was initiated, the decree was ultimately rejected, with roadblocks being set up in several regions of the country. After weeks of conflict and negotiations, the government repealed the Decree but enacted a new one, which maintained the removal of the petrol subsidy, with the majority of the population in favour.

Whilst there has been a decrease in violations of fundamental freedoms attributable to government actions, incidents were recorded, such as the deaths of two people in [Colcapirhua following a police intervention against demonstrators demanding the closure of the landfill site located in that town.](#) With a discourse aimed at restructuring the state, including changes to the ministerial organisation and the partial renewal of civil servants, the government initiated criminal proceedings for corruption against former officials from the Movement for Socialism administrations. Beyond the institutional legacy it inherited, the presidential cabinet faces criticism from Vice-President Edman Lara, who has distanced himself from the administration, raising questions about President Paz, legislators and journalists. His statements, directed in particular against the press, have caused concern over potential impacts on press freedom.

## 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

The extent of violations against journalists and media workers in Bolivia has decreased in number compared to the previous period (January–August 2025). [The UNITAS Human Rights Observatory](#) recorded 40 violations of press freedom between late October 2025 and late February 2026, compared to 120 cases reported in the previous period. To date, attacks on press freedom continue to be recorded. During the protests against Supreme Decree 5503, which took place from 19 December 2025 to mid-January 2026, several journalists were attacked by demonstrators in the cities of [La Paz](#) and [El Alto](#), as well as at [various roadblocks in the west of the country.](#) In light of these events, the National Association of Journalists of Bolivia, [the profession's](#) leading representative body, [criticised the police's absence and failure to act to protect and guarantee the exercise of journalistic work.](#)

Furthermore, [a serious assault was reported against a journalist in the city of El Alto](#), who was allegedly abducted by unknown individuals, threatened, strangled and attacked with a bladed weapon whilst carrying out his work. Two days later, when filing a formal criminal complaint

with the Public Prosecutor's Office, the victim amended his initial account and denied having suffered the previously reported cut to his tongue. [The La Paz Departmental Federation of Journalists reported threats against the journalist and possible acts of negligence by judicial officials before and during the taking of his statement.](#) At the same time, stigmatising statements were made by the Vice-President of the State, in which three journalists were mentioned by name and the press sector was criticised in general terms. Despite the decline in violations of press freedom, journalists still face a situation of vulnerability in the course of their work, lacking security and guarantees from the police, as well as adequate attention from judicial officials regarding the violations they have suffered.

With regard to freedom of peaceful assembly and the right to protest, a case of repeated criminalisation against the same group of defenders was identified. In January, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB) and Petrobras filed [a criminal complaint against 16 defenders of the Tariquía Nature Reserve](#) for opposing the entry of a police contingent into the access area of an oil well within that territory. These events took place in the context of a [previous criminal case initiated in October 2024](#) against defenders of the same territory. Furthermore, during the protests against Supreme Decree 5503, two incidents involving protests that escalated into violence were recorded: [the first between the Bolivian Workers' Confederation \(COB\) and sections of the population in La Paz opposed to the protests;](#) and the second [between the same organisation and the group known as Ponchos Rojos, who rejected the agreement reached with the government.](#) In the current Bolivian context, the right to protest remains vulnerable to infringement. In particular, it could be seriously undermined if the [legislative proposal](#) known as the "Anti-Blockade Law", tabled by MP Carlos Alarcón on 15 December 2025, proceeds to impose a 20-year prison sentence on those who promote, finance or organise road blockades. As will be seen, this is more about criminalising roadblocks than protest itself, but at present there has been no progress in its legislative processing.

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

Although the Constitution provides a regulatory framework favourable to civil society and the development of its activities – through [Law 351 granting legal personality](#) – those responsible for its implementation create many obstacles. These begin at the stage of establishing associations for civil purposes, interfering with the free determination of statutes, activities and objectives. Added to this is the fact that the five regulatory decrees ([DS 1597](#) of 2013; [DS 1987](#) of 2014; [DS 2650](#) of 2016; [DS 3746](#) of 2018 and [DS 4353](#) of 2020) have created greater bureaucracy in the submission of paperwork by CSOs, making the procedures for regularising or obtaining legal status more complicated, thereby affecting civil society's ability to exercise its right to freedom of assembly.

No mention has yet been made by government authorities of changing this legal framework during their first 100 days in office. The obstacles to the establishment and/or continued operation of civil society organisations remain a persistent problem affecting the enabling environment for CSOs in Bolivia; this has been the case for the past 12 years, since the legal framework came into force. A key aspect for civil society and its organisations is having an enabling environment that facilitates dialogue; therefore, the Partners for Development Group (GRUS), a forum comprising cooperation agencies, embassies and some civil society networks, proposes moving forward with all legal changes or reforms that are conducive to this.

As for the decrees issued by the government, these have not been published in the Official State Gazette, thereby affecting citizens' access to public information. This model of governance through such legal provisions represents a concentration of decision-making within the Executive Branch, undermining the constitutional roles of the Legislative Branch and, consequently, citizen participation.

### 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

With regard to access to sustainable resources, in recent months, the Swedish government [announced](#) in December 2025 the phased winding down of its bilateral development cooperation with Bolivia and the closure of its embassy in La Paz, a process expected to be completed by the end of 2026 as part of a reorientation of its foreign policy. Its areas of action have focused on gender equality, the environment, climate and sustainable use of resources, human rights and democracy, and academic research – fields in which cooperation has contributed to strengthening civil society's capacities and agendas. The withdrawal of this actor poses a risk to the financial sustainability of organisations working on these issues, by reducing sources of funding, opportunities for cooperation and advocacy efforts. On the other hand, the influx of new funding from [multilateral banks](#) poses challenges for civil society as a development actor, prioritising economic growth and investment that favour the private sector as the central implementing actor.

### 4. State openness and responsiveness

Interaction between civil society and the state in Bolivia remains weak and fragmented, although progress has been evident under the new government. Several institutions within the Executive Branch have established or proposed technical working groups for dialogue, coordination and the development of joint proposals in various areas, such as [education](#). The [Ministry of Education](#), the [Ministry of Labour](#) and the [Vice-Ministry of Equal Opportunities](#) have established forums to address key issues cooperatively.

In this context, the rapprochement and negotiation regarding [Decree 5503](#) is a key milestone. The government demonstrated openness, a capacity for dialogue and an interest in addressing the demands of the mobilised sectors, to the extent of [conceding on a measure it had not intended to amend](#). This is an unequivocal sign of progress towards a more favourable enabling environment for civil society.

However, the government's decrees have not been published in the Official State Gazette, affecting citizens' access to public information and the possibility of generating public debate between civil society and the State. In fact, the channelling of these reforms through Supreme Decrees represents a concentration of decision-making within the Executive Branch, undermining the system of institutional checks and balances, as well as citizen participation. This dynamic reduces spaces for public deliberation, limits legislative debate and restricts the informed participation of civil society in the formulation of policies that have direct effects on the population.

With regard to the Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES) for the next five-year period, the government has pushed for its development within tight deadlines, with the process due to conclude in March 2026, by which date it would be submitted to the Plurinational Legislative Assembly for approval. Although spaces have been created for consultation and the collection of proposals from civil society actors, the haste of the process and the absence of a prior phase of reflection limit the possibility of adequate participation and similarly affect their involvement in shaping the guidelines that will govern the state's progress. This could also undermine the quality of the process and allow certain actions by different actors to be exploited for political ends.

At the same time, the announcement of structural production laws, such as the investment law, the hydrocarbons law and the lithium law, amongst others, signals a greater prominence of the private sector as a central actor in economic development, thereby to some extent sidelining civil society from the discussion on development prospects, and disregarding the Istanbul Principles and the climate commitments undertaken in the Paris Agreement which underpin its participation.

The European Union has approved the civil society roadmap, which proposes multi-stakeholder participation to advance the exploitation of lithium and other minerals, whereby comprehensive local development is considered a priority link in the economic development chain. This could be an interesting initiative to prevent the instrumentalisation of civil society, based on the creation of relationships underpinned by trust.

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

Following the change of government, negative discourse towards civil society decreased compared to the previous period. However, stigmatising and threatening statements were recorded, hindering civil society participation. The Vice-President made stigmatising remarks against [two journalists](#), [the profession in general](#) and [the media](#) less than three weeks after taking office, suggesting that they were undermining his administration for personal gain. Similarly, the Minister of Justice stated that anyone seeking to harm the Government would be investigated. These actions may undermine the enabling environment to the extent of creating a climate of self-censorship due to fear of public delegitimisation or threats from the authorities.

With regard to public perception, the protests against Decree-Law 5503 revealed negative views among the population towards the organisations involved, particularly the Bolivian Workers' Confederation (COB). During the conflict, a pre-candidate for the sub-national elections and the leader of a social organisation claimed that the COB was being funded by a specific group and no longer represented the working class. Similarly, the opposition of the population of La Paz to the COB's protests and the Ponchos Rojos' disagreement with the agreement reached with the government also demonstrate a negative perception of the actions taken by the COB. This case is an example of the widespread delegitimisation of social organisations.

Whilst greater austerity within national public administration may be beneficial in addressing the economic and social crisis, there is [uncertainty](#) regarding how certain ministries, vice-ministries and/or directorates will be incorporated within the government structure, such as the Vice-Ministry of Equal Opportunities (VIO), which was absorbed by the Ministry of the Presidency and the Plurinational Service for Women and Depatriarchalisation (SEPMUD). Likewise, it is unclear where other services for vulnerable populations that previously fell under the Ministry of Justice – which ceased to exist in November 2025 – will be located, such as the Plurinational Victim Assistance Service (SEPDAMI), the National Service for Victim Assistance – SEPDAMI, the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities (CONALPEDIS) and the National Public Defence Service – SEPD. The organisations stated that the closure contravenes domestic regulations and international commitments, and demanded a public and transparent transition plan.

## 6. Access to a secure digital environment

The digital environment in Bolivia has not undergone significant changes during this period. Although no cases of cyberattacks against journalists, defenders or members of civil society

have been recorded, the lack of protection remains. There is still no regulatory framework, tools or protocols in place to ensure a safe digital environment. Similarly, disinformation remains a latent and growing risk, given the increasing sophistication of tools used to generate content that undermines the enabling environment. Since the start of the electoral calendar for the sub-national elections, which will take place on 22 March 2026, the election-specialised unit of the fact-checking organisation “Bolivia Verifica” has recorded 51 instances of disinformation, including [false](#) and [misleading](#) information published in various public media outlets.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Faced with a scenario that, at first glance, appears more encouraging than in the previous period, there is an opportunity to launch advocacy campaigns to address the regulatory obstacles that civil society has faced for over a decade, particularly regarding the excessive hurdles and requirements for the formation, self-determination and continued operation of civil associations. Similarly, the current context allows various civil society organisations to put forward proposals to define, amend or reform public policies and regulations on issues relating to the enabling environment and their own objectives.

So far, there is a sense of anticipation regarding the formation of partnerships and multi-stakeholder dialogues aimed at fostering progress towards an enabling environment in Bolivia, thereby improving conditions for civil society in the country, based on ongoing analysis of the context.

Another challenge centres on the government taking on the role of guarantor of human rights, rather than focusing solely on economic recovery – which is undoubtedly a necessity – whilst not relegating social development to the background.

Initiating far-reaching reforms in bodies or institutions other than the executive branch also presents a significant challenge. Preventing further instances of criminalisation, alleged negligence by judicial officials, or police dereliction of duty is a task that depends on structural and long-term changes, which must be promoted and supported by a united and steadfast civil society.

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