EU SEE

SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Bolivia

Country Focus Report

2026

Photo credit: Rodrigo Gonzalez

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A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

What we understand by an Enabling Environment is the combination of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and promote the work of civil society. Within such an environment, civil society can engage in political and public life without fear of reprisals, openly express its views, and actively participate in shaping its context. This includes a supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, ensuring access to information and resources that are sustainable and flexible to pursue their goals unhindered, in safe physical and digital spaces. In an enabling environment, the state demonstrates openness and responsiveness in governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Positive values, norms, attitudes, and practices towards civil society from state and non-state actors further underscore the supportive environment.

To capture the state of the Enabling Environment, we use the following six principles:

In this Country Focus Report, each enabling principle is assessed with a quantitative score and complemented by an analysis and recommendations written by our Network Members. Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the 6 principles, discerning dimensions of strength and those requiring attention.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in the insights and diverse perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with representatives from civil society to discuss and evaluate the state of the Enabling Environment. Their collective input enriches the report with a grounded, participatory assessment. This primary input is further supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and strengthen the analysis.

Reporting period covered: March 2025 – July 2026

Brief Overview of the Country Context

Bolivia is going through one of the most critical phases of a multidimensional crisis that has shaped the enabling environment for civil society. This report highlights a deterioration across several dimensions, amidst an acute economic crisis, with record-high levels of inflation and recession. The economic situation is expected to worsen in the coming months. Against this backdrop, the State's response does not appear to offer clear signals as to the path to follow in order to build robust, sustainable and long-term solutions that also include civil society organisations (CSOs). The year 2025 was also marked by the general elections in August (first round) and October (second round), which exacerbated conflict and polarisation, placing sustained pressure on CSOs. Although CSOs continue to play a leading role in the defence of rights, the state constantly imposes conditions on their work, calling into question the full exercise of fundamental freedoms and their participation in the design of public policies.

The change of government in November 2025 and the end of a political era resulted in high social, economic and political costs, hindering the building of sustained alliances between the state and civil society. By the end of 2025, Bolivia was experiencing stagflation. The IBCE reported a multidimensional crisis, comprising 11 consecutive years of fiscal deficit and three years of trade deficit, alongside a rise in the dollar exchange rate, increased costs and fuel shortages. This situation led to a fall in GDP of around 2.4 per cent and inflation of approximately 20 per cent, eroding purchasing power and social stability. Against this backdrop, "Bolivia lost its capacity for economic agency: the ability of its citizens and businesses to create value, adopt technology and compete in domestic and export markets." (Hausmann et al., 2026, p. 6).

In turn, the phasing out of fuel subsidies led to price rises that affected Bolivian households through various channels. The adjustment was passed on to public transport fares and the prices of consumer goods. In this context, the first half of 2026 was marked by a deterioration in the enabling environment, resulting from the crisis in democratic institutions and social unrest, which led to more than fifty days of social protests with road blockades across almost the entire country. This conflict could not be resolved until a state of emergency was declared via Supreme Decree 1740, following multiple failed attempts at dialogue with the protesting groups.

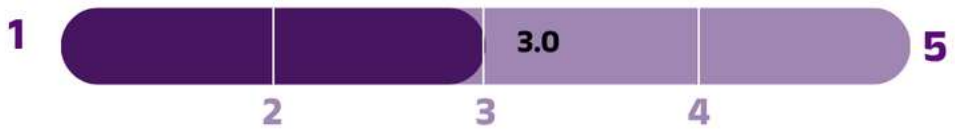
At the same time, CSOs have been subjected to stigmatising practices and legal proceedings by the current government for championing legitimate causes such as the defence of the environment and indigenous peoples against extractive policies, respect for the exercise of fundamental freedoms, and the enforcement of labour rights in a context of increasing precariousness, amongst others. Nevertheless, CSOs continue to take action to tackle these structural problems, albeit without an effective framework for their protection. As a result, the environment for civil society has become more restrictive than it was during the period 2024–2025. Since 2018, the civic space in Bolivia has remained unfavourable for civil society organisations (CSOs). According to the CIVICUS MONITOR Tracking Civic Space (2026), the country scored 50 points and remained in the 'OBSTRUCTED' category, one point lower than in 2024 (51).

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: [1]



The economic crisis contributed directly to the rise in social unrest. The Ombudsman's Office recorded 841 incidents of unrest in 2025, more than double the historical average over the last 50 years (362), mainly linked to economic and labour rights, basic services, transport and public policies. Another report by the Ombudsman's Office noted that shortages of basic goods, speculation and the rise in the cost of the basic basket of goods affected vulnerable sections of the population most severely.

Throughout 2026, social unrest persisted. This was no longer driven solely by the shortage of US dollars or the partial removal of fuel subsidies, but also by the lack of immediate responses to the country's economic problems. This not only led to protests and demonstrations but also to road blockades, creating tensions within civic space and, on occasions, resulting in violations of other freedoms and rights. The demonstrations and roadblocks caused economic losses of 1,110 million dollars in the export and tourism sectors and were accompanied by acts of violence that left at least 7 people dead. At times, the state's response involved excessive use of force. Between January 2024 and March 2026, 1,561 incidents of unrest and an average of 15 roadblocks per month were recorded, with roadblocks being the main means of exerting pressure.

[1] *This is a rebased score derived from the CIVICUS Monitor rating published in December 2025.*

The prolonged roadblocks and protests, which lasted for 51 days across various regions, led Rodrigo Paz's government to invoke, for the first time, the Law 1740 on the Regulation of States of Emergency. On 20 June 2026, by means of Supreme Decree 5636, a state of emergency was declared in response to the road blockades and the paralysis of activities, with the joint participation of the Armed Forces and the Bolivian Police.

Law 1740 implements Article 139 of the Political Constitution of the State (CPE) and establishes procedures, limits and principles — proportionality, necessity, temporality and graduality — for the adoption of extraordinary measures. In the early hours of 21 June 2026, the Plurinational Legislative Assembly approved the state of emergency. Although it formally preserves fundamental rights, its application in a context of high levels of conflict and a heavy presence of security forces raises concerns about its chilling effect on protest and civil action. According to UNITAS, CSOs "continue to be the main target of threats, attacks, stigmatising practices and criminalisation by a broad spectrum of perpetrators, led by state bodies".

Experts stated that *"in the context of the state of emergency, the freedom of peaceful assembly is being violated because [one is] automatically liable to prosecution for terrorism and other offences. (..) There is fear amongst organisations. At the same time, this leads to roadblocks becoming excessive and putting the population's lives, health and food security at risk.*

Of the 619 human rights violations recorded by the UNITAS Human Rights Observatory in 2025, 7.4 per cent concerned freedom of expression (a 35.3 per cent increase compared with 2024), 3.9 per cent concerned freedom of peaceful assembly and the right to protest, and 2.7 per cent concerned freedom of association. During the first half of 2026, these percentages stood at 11.1 per cent, 1.8 per cent and 0.1 per cent, respectively. The data suggest a shift in tactics aimed at restricting civic space: from a diverse pattern in 2025 to a greater focus on freedom of expression in 2026, with increased pressure on critical and dissenting voices through threats or intimidation, prior censorship, pressure or interference, and physical, psychological or sexual aggression.

The panellists noted that polarisation and socio-political conflict in Bolivia have led to an increase in scrutiny and reprisals against civil society organisations working with indigenous peoples and rural communities. As a result, these organisations are subject to disproportionate controls, leading to self-censorship and an increasingly unequal environment for the exercise of fundamental freedoms.

"CSOs can carry out investigations and express their opinions, but only with certain restrictions and a fear of reprisals. It is clear that we do not all think alike, and often the diversity of thoughts, intentions and positions can lead to a war of disparagement and reactions that may jeopardise the freedoms of environmental defenders, particularly when they speak out. The same applies to journalists carrying out investigative reporting and to digital media (…) freedom of expression is finding new ways to make itself felt".

Expert opinion at the La Paz Panel.

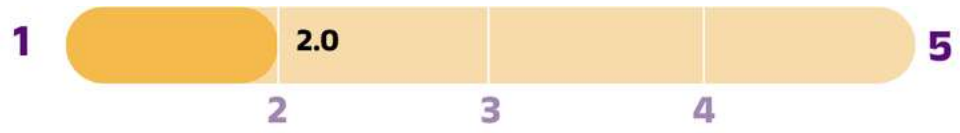
In this context, freedom of association is also affected, as *"in practice, obstacles are observed in obtaining legal status. Whilst this requirement does not prevent the day-to-day functioning of an association, institution, etc., it does restrict their access to resources and even to certain forms of social control".*

The enabling environment has therefore become more restrictive and unequal for CSOs and perpetuates asymmetries within the civil society ecosystem.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



CSOs, NGOs, foundations and non-profit civil organisations that carry out activities in more than one department must apply for legal status with the Vice-Ministry of Autonomies. If they operate solely within a single department, they must apply to the Departmental Autonomous Government. In addition, national NGOs must register with the Single National Register of Non-Governmental Organisations (RUN – ONG), administered by the Vice-Ministry of Public Investment and External Financing (VIPFE), in accordance with the provisions of Law 351, whilst foreign NGOs must provide evidence of a Basic Cooperation Framework Agreement (AMCB) .

Law 351 sets out the requirements governing the functioning, governance and operational capacity of CSOs. It digitises and centralises administrative procedures through the creation of the Legal Entities Registration System (SIREPEJU), administered by the Vice-Ministry of Autonomies; regulates the reservation of names; sets out the requirements for the incorporation of organisations; reinforces the content required in the statutes; regulates the processing of amendments to the articles of association before the said vice-ministry; and regulates the compliance of pre-existing organisations.

Registration processes are **restrictive** due to superficial observations, unclear criteria, a lack of guidance on the procedures required for registration, and delays that hinder formalisation and access to resources. For example, the Administrative Resolution No. 15 of 8 July 2016 issued by the VIPFE "increased the number of requirements for each type of procedure, a situation which led to a high number of errors in the submission of applications by interested parties and delays beyond the pre-established timeframes". In this regard, the experts indicated that *"whilst there is a regulatory framework in place, [it] does not provide protection for all organisations, as they continue to [grapple] with bureaucracy".* Furthermore, it was

pointed out that the criteria set out in Law 351 are applied on the basis of political affinities, favouring projects aligned with the Government's agenda.

There are also obstacles to registration with the VIPFE and in the audits of health funds, with the imposition of high fines, as the experts pointed out. This trend is reflected in the decline in the number of registered NGOs, which fell from 1,980 in 2015 to 206 in 2025, equivalent to a decrease of 89.6 per cent. At the VIPFE, the number of international NGOs fell from 185 to 44 over the last 10 years, which represents a reduction of 76.2 per cent. As at 29 May 2026, there were 260 registered national NGOs and 49 foreign NGOs

The implementation of international standards, such as the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), introduced mechanisms for identifying the ultimate beneficial owner. For CSOs, this entails greater registration and reporting obligations, additional administrative burdens and the risk of sanctions or obstacles due to non-compliance.

The operational environment is also considered restrictive because organisations with valid legal status are required to update their institutional information periodically. Supervisory and funding procedures are particularly complex for organisations with limited human resources. For example, "the Manual of Processes and Procedures does not cover the deregistration and update procedures carried out by NGOs, and unnecessarily requires the Certificate of Exemption from Corporation Tax (IUE)".

Although it is not formally required, organisations feel pressured to align themselves with the government's agenda, including the Patriotic Agenda 2030, as the panellists pointed out: *"in practice, there is constant pressure to follow a [pre-established] agenda that frames the actions of CSOs*". This situation encourages self-censorship, reduces the diversity of voices and limits attention to issues not prioritised by the state.

Furthermore, foreign NGOs and foundations are subject to stricter requirements through the AMCBs. Donors also face pressure to align their cooperation with state priorities, creating a framework of restrictions that undermines CSOs' autonomy.

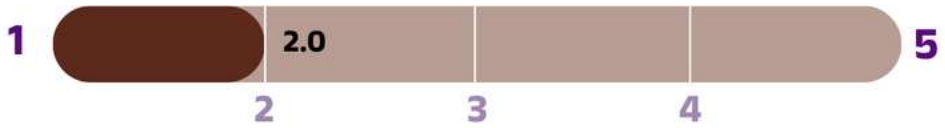
Although the legislation recognises fundamental freedoms, its application is, therefore, inconsistent. The discretionary use of Law 351 can turn it into a mechanism of control and surveillance, as *"it depends on the line the organisation takes and the position it adopts towards the government".* This confirms the persistence of an environment of vulnerability to state and political interference.

On 19 June 2026, the Casa de la Mujer reported that around twenty civil servants and police officers had entered its offices, an operation it described as a raid and a violation of the rights and privacy of women who are survivors of violence. This intervention was carried out without respect for constitutional guarantees, and affected service users who were receiving psychological and legal support. The Ombudsman's Office reiterated that the authorities must act in accordance with constitutional safeguards, due process and human rights. However, the lack of transparent explanations and an official report, despite statements from various CSOs, points to an abuse of power that undermines institutional trust and leaves organisations in a defenceless position.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



Civil society organisations face an unfavourable environment in terms of access to resources, due to reduced funding for CSOs, the withdrawal of international cooperation, the economic crisis and a lack of incentives for donors. This situation limits institutional sustainability and discourages initiatives, particularly in the areas of human rights, the environment and gender.

As part of a global restructuring, the Swedish Government announced in December 2025 that it would gradually close its embassy in Bolivia over the course of a year, bringing its cooperation programmes with the country to an end. The decision was taken as part of the reform of its international cooperation and the prioritisation of its support for Ukraine, "in order to ensure the responsible management of current projects and commitments". This situation is unfolding both in the region and globally.

In this regard, it was felt that the lack of access to resources posed an obstacle, given that *"there is increasingly less funding for CSOs. [There was] a withdrawal of international aid, particularly for those populations considered the most vulnerable*". There are further barriers to accessing resources, such as tax obligations and very strict requirements, particularly when organisations lack legal status, which disproportionately affects smaller organisations, which also face information gaps regarding donors and multilateral funds: *"Indigenous peoples and defenders of indigenous peoples have no knowledge of donors or other sources of funding. We work on a voluntary basis and with our own resources*."

Furthermore, *"self-organised defenders face the problem of legal status when trying to access resources*". Whilst *"resources do exist, not everyone qualifies. (…). Many of the activities cannot be quantified or supported by invoices*". Added to this are *"the lack of US dollars, tax requirements, [payments to] the Gestora [social security system] and [to] health* insurance *funds, which are very cumbersome and subject to fines*". This represents an additional

administrative and financial burden, especially for small or grassroots organisations with limited accounting capacity.

Furthermore, *"the shift towards an international agenda focused on the environment [is] to the detriment of other human rights, [such as those of] women, LGBTIQ+ communities [and] indigenous peoples".* This confirms that *"some civil society actors face disadvantages and greater restrictions when accessing sources of funding*". One case cited during the panel discussion was that of Italian funds allocated to the church for the defence of the Amazon, access to which was restricted due to the exchange rate and the funds' pastoral and social purpose.

The prioritisation of certain agendas therefore sidelines other needs. Furthermore, the US$500 million approved by the IDB to strengthen social protection—intended to benefit over one million people living in poverty or in vulnerable situations—will be administered directly by the state, without involving CSOs with expertise in these areas.

CSOs face obstacles to using resources effectively, and their autonomy in disbursing funds is often limited. Added to this is the fact that the resources available for carrying out projects and activities are reduced following the fulfilment of the tax obligations to which organisations are subject, which weakens their operational capacity and their ability to implement programmes. Given the limited availability of funding, CSOs are forced to adapt to the environment and accept the conditions described regarding the use of resources, whilst seeking to preserve their management capacity and effectiveness. Otherwise, they run the risk of running out of resources and even jeopardising their sustainability.

Sustainability is further constrained by the tax system, as *"it does not facilitate the formalisation of activities that generate income. According to the National Tax Authority, this alters the nature of CSOs*".

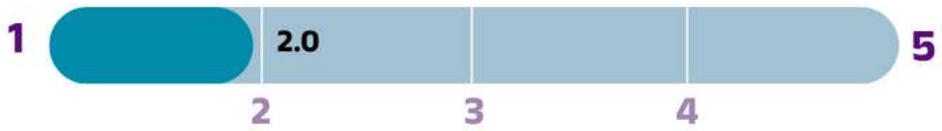
Whilst RND No. 10-0030-05, as amended by RND No. 10-0030-2014, allows NGOs and foundations to benefit from exemption from the IUE (Article 49(b) of Law 843) when they carry out commercial activities, provided that the revenue is used exclusively to finance their activities, is not distributed amongst their members, and this condition is set out in their articles of association, the Tax Authority may at any time audit compliance with Act 2493 and Supreme Decree 27190. If it determines that there has been a breach, it may revoke the exemption and demand retroactive payment of the tax plus penalties (Article 47 of Law 2492). This situation creates financial uncertainty, increases administrative burdens and discourages the diversification of income, thereby reinforcing dependence on external donors and limiting the sustainability of CSOs.

Consequently, the sustainability of resources is also a constraint, as funding is insufficient, short-term and concentrated on specific projects, which makes voluntary work precarious and limits long-term planning. Irregular disbursements, tax burdens and the lack of contingency plans — when *"the donor decides to change its approach and focus*" — force many CSOs to reduce their staff due to limited access to funding and to rely on volunteers, their own contributions and self-management.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



The state's openness and responsiveness are considered restrictive due to difficulties in accessing reliable information, the absence of effective channels for participation and mistrust of government reports. Although multi-stakeholder dialogues were promoted, these efforts took place against a backdrop of mistrust and social strain, particularly during the 51 days of protests and social demonstrations.

The expert panel noted that public reports tend to be biased, triumphalist and lacking in disaggregated data; it also highlighted the absence of a freedom of information act, restrictions on obtaining data and the discretion exercised over what is published. The obligation to report at least twice a year, as established by Law 341 (Art. 10, para. 2), is not being met. The State is failing to fulfil its obligations to promote and facilitate access to information for actors involved in social oversight (Articles 33 and 34 of Law 341). A weak culture of transparency persists, with *"gaps still existing in access to and the quality of data*". Indeed, there is a perception that the design of public policies or strategic decision-making by the Government is *"carried out behind [civil society's] back, without transparency or consultation*".

Public information "is neither free nor readily available"; it is limited, delayed and difficult to verify, a situation that is exacerbated in matters of national interest.

In October 2024, Bill 160/2023-2024 was passed by the Senate, but its approval by the Chamber of Deputies remained pending. However, in November 2025, a request was made to reintroduce the bill in the current legislative session and, in March 2026, a committee of deputies began work on the Public Information Access Act. Its approval is imperative to strengthen CSOs' capacity to access information and exercise social control, in a context heavily marked by cases of corruption that reflect institutional weakness and serious problems in the public sector, such as the reopening of the 'Indigenous Fund' case, irregularities at the

Food Production Support Company (EMAPA) and at Bolivian State Oil Fields (YPFB), among other illegal acts dating back to the administrations of Evo Morales and Luis Arce, as well as the case known as 'junk petrol' or ' -destabilised petrol' during the government of Rodrigo Paz, which involves officials from the National Hydrocarbons Agency (ANH) and the Bolivian State Oil Company (YPFB).

The current environment for civil society participation in consultation mechanisms is also considered restrictive. CSOs are taken into account *'to validate consultation processes' – which are* largely symbolic – but are subject to practices such as co-optation or division, which undermine their autonomy and prevent more effective social oversight. Priority is given to organisations aligned with the government, whilst defenders, indigenous peoples, LGBTIQ+ associations and critical groups are excluded, particularly in the drafting of legislation and consultations on natural resources and extractive projects. For example, the Ombudsman's Office lodged an appeal before the Agro-Environmental Court of Entre Ríos, seeking a ruling from the Agro-Environmental Tribunal on the application of Supreme Decree 3549, in contravention of the provisions of Law 3058 on Hydrocarbons, which stipulates that the communities of the Chuquiacá canton must be consulted prior to the siting of hydrocarbon exploration projects, as required by the CPE and the Escazú Agreement. The Ombudsman's Office noted "the absence of a site remediation process for the land where the exploration project known as Oso Domo X has been established". This project affects the Tariquía Reserve, which has reignited the campaign by various groups and environmental defenders.

Participation in Bolivia and institutional openness are more rhetorical than effective; *"this stems from the promotion of a culture that validates only the participation of CSOs that serve the interests of the government in power". The objective of* strengthening democracy through participation and preventing corruption is not taken into account, and *"consultation only takes place when it is needed [or] when groups are sought that can endorse the government's proposal*". Consequently, participation occurs *"only at specific times and with specific actors"*, with critical voices being excluded at the government's discretion.

One factor that must be taken into account is that "the polarisation currently affecting the country hinders dialogue with state institutions, eroding public trust and potentially leading to self-censorship. The most recent socio-political conflict in Bolivia has led the government to accuse certain NGOs of [causing] destabilisation".

Another example illustrating this practice of failing to consult CSOs -particularly indigenous peoples and smallholders- relates to Law 1720. The legislation authorised the voluntary and cost-free conversion of small agricultural holdings into medium-sized ones to facilitate access to credit, but was subsequently repealed. This reinforced the perception that *"[CSOs] are only consulted to be informed of decisions made by political leaders*". State mechanisms operate in a bureaucratic manner, providing minimal, unclear and difficult-to-verify information, and they limit social oversight in matters relating to lithium, mining concessions in protected areas and the public budget.

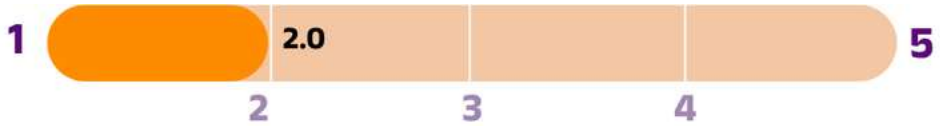
CSOs are often invited to events or working groups, but they do not receive information on how their input is used, nor do they participate in feedback sessions where it is explained how their contributions have been incorporated, or where the reasons for their rejection are justified. The lack of transparency is a structural problem because accountability *"is not based on explanations that substantiate what [the authorities] say*". Civil society also perceives that *"the government provides minimal (incomprehensible) or unclear feedback to avoid scrutiny*".

As a result, CSOs have little opportunity to verify whether public commitments are being met or whether their proposals have been incorporated. The announcement of laws on investment, hydrocarbons and lithium, aimed at strengthening the role of the private sector, could further reduce their scope for influence, which is at odds with the Istanbul Principles and the Escazú Agreement. Finally, accountability forums are largely inaccessible to sectors with limited access to information, as *"they end up being specialised forums or ones dealing with complex information for civil society in general*". Furthermore, these processes take place *"without even the possibility of asking questions*". This dynamic undermines transparency, limits effective participation and perpetuates the absence of mechanisms for disseminating the results of consultations in which CSOs are involved.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



Public discourse towards CSOs, which is ambivalent and often hostile, creates a restrictive environment. Public delegitimisation, suspicion and stigmatisation undermine their recognition and restrict their capacity for advocacy. Rather than fostering a relationship of cooperation and respect, the most recent political climate has ended up acting as a deterrent to civil society action. CSOs face accusations of destabilisation, smear campaigns, hate speech and public condemnation from the authorities and the media, particularly when they work with indigenous peoples, rural communities and on human rights issues.

The socio-political conflicts of May and June 2026 cemented a climate of suspicion, stigma and overt or covert persecution. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) expressed its concern over the escalation of social unrest and its impact on human rights in Bolivia. The official narrative portrays the right to protest and to association as threats to public order; it delegitimises collective action by suggesting that demonstrations are not genuine expressions of social demands, but rather coordinated operations with political or violent aims. The cases cited illustrate how the State distinguishes between 'legitimate' social organisations (those that exercise social control within institutional frameworks) and those whose actions exceed tolerated limits.

During the more than 50 days of conflict, this lack of understanding fuelled the spread of widespread prejudices towards both mobilised and non-mobilised organisations, deepening their stigmatisation and discrediting them.

The panel noted that *"stigmatising narratives about NGOs have emerged, [which are] generally promoted by political actors"* and that there is a *"'politicised' invalidation of certain CSOs*". In this regard, the Foreign Minister, Fernando Aramayo, stated publicly that "there are various sources funding this type of destabilising activity, [such as] NGOs, foundations, and funds from organised crime (…). It is unacceptable for anyone to feel they can come here and carry out activities that destabilise our democracy. That is something we will not allow".

In response, 67 CSOs issued a joint statement denouncing an escalation of stigmatisation, which links CSOs to illicit or destabilising activities, portraying CSOs as actors that promote social conflict or oppose government policies. These narratives included allegations that could put the organisations at risk of dissolution, such as accusations of non-compliance with the law or of carrying out activities other than those set out in their statutes.

The panel noted that *"[there are] authorities who take a directly confrontational stance"* in response to any criticism or reports of rights violations.

This was evident in the controversies surrounding Law 1720, which "provoked opposition from indigenous and peasant organisations". In this context, five NGOs – including the Centre for Research and Promotion of Peasants' Rights (CIPCA), Fundación Tierra, the Documentation and Information Centre – Bolivia (CEDIB), the Centre for Legal Studies and Social Research (CEJIS) and Fundación Solón – were accused by an opposition senator of securing funding from European cooperation and of "using it to deceive indigenous people. They lie to them, telling them they are going to lose their land. [To] the European funders I say: set the record straight for the country – are you complicit in this deception, or have you also been misled about the actual use of your funds?"

As a result, misinformation is spreading and *"a culture that exacerbates hate speech prevails, and this also affects CSOs".* Furthermore, *"MPs from both the ruling party and the opposition have singled out certain NGOs for attempting to destabilise the government. The country's democratic institutions and stability are eroding, [just as] polarisation and hate speech are on the rise*". The media also contribute to this climate, as *"[the] mass media have a political bias [that is] downplaying [social] struggles. Social media ridicules the actions of civil society*". Thus, polarisation and disinformation in public discourse limit the development of a pluralistic agenda.

Although CSOs retain the capacity to mobilise, various state bodies and authorities *"discredit CSOs with the clear intention of undermining their public influence*". Despite the fact that *"there is public awareness of the defence of rights promoted by social organisations, (…) over these 20 years of MAS government, the very nature of a CSO and its objectives has been distorted*". Patronage, political favouritism and the fragmentation of organisations have undermined the legitimacy of bodies such as the Bolivian Workers' Confederation (COB), which has been accused of failing to represent the working class.

Such practices prevent recognition of the positive role played by civil society, and curtail citizens' own participation in political processes and community initiatives. Owing to growing polarisation, many citizens confuse political participation with party-political activism, which discourages broader and more sustained civic participation by CSOs in decision-making forums.

As a result, the participation of large sections of society is limited to electoral processes or formal events. In 2024, 48.2 per cent of Bolivian society did not often express their views on the country's problems. Furthermore, mistrust of the government reduces civic participation, as well as the motivation to vote, organise or get involved in public affairs, as people expect their actions to have little impact.

This situation particularly affects youth organisations, which feel co-opted, persecuted and politicised. It also hinders renewal within more established CSOs. According to the panel, *"[there is] mistrust in the role of [young people]. [Young people] distrust or distance themselves from political spaces due to the perception [that exists] of politics, [pointing out] that it serves*

only a partisan purpose". This trend affects organisations differently, as *"social organisations, particularly indigenous, peasant and trade union organisations, have a high capacity for mobilisation and advocacy*".

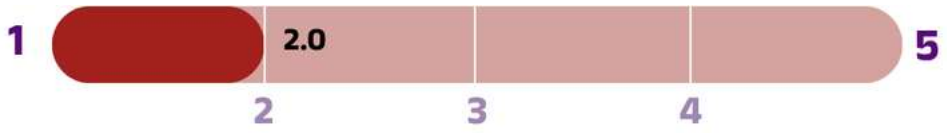
Furthermore, there is a restrictive environment for the equal participation of all sectors of society in civic processes, despite the existence of a legal framework guaranteeing citizen participation, equality and social control, recognised in the Political Constitution of the State and supplemented by specific regulations on social control (Law 341) and the fight against discrimination. However, their implementation is largely ineffective, compounded by a lack of institutional framework, funding and oversight.

In more specific cases, *"there is [a] stigma towards minority groups, including discrimination against groups in [vulnerable] situations or with mental health issues, such as the homeless population*". In this context, *"there is a surge in conservative rhetoric that increasingly reinforces the exclusion of [the] historically marginalised population".* For example, a setback is reported in 2026 in the fight against discrimination in employment, education and housing against LGBTIQ+ people, as well as the recording of more than 9,000 messages of digital violence against female politicians during the sub-national elections in March 2026. Indeed, *"there has been a significant setback in the development of strategies to guarantee participation*". Consequently, inequality continues to determine who can participate and fully exercise their civic rights.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



The digital environment does not yet fully enable collective action. Although the 2009 Constitution recognises collective rights, it does not address the current challenges posed by artificial intelligence, which maintains a regulatory gap and exposes citizens and CSOs to new forms of vulnerability. In this context, equitable access to the internet is directly linked to CSOs' ability to organise, document complaints, mobilise support and communicate their positions. The lack of protection leaves them exposed to surveillance, disinformation, harassment and digital attacks. In 2025, the UNITAS Observatory documented one case of cyberbullying as a violation of freedom of expression, eleven cases of cyberbullying against journalists and five cases of physical, psychological, sexual or cyber-based attacks on human rights defenders.

The panel identified the use of fake accounts, 'digital warriors' and bots to manipulate public opinion, discredit critical voices and promote hate speech and disinformation. The absence of specific regulations on data protection, digital security and online violence leaves journalists, activists, indigenous peoples, and environmental and human rights defenders particularly vulnerable. For example, the journalist and editor-in-chief of the digital portal InfoYapacaní – who also contributes to the newspaper El Deber – received death threats online from two private users after publishing a series of complaints from residents of the municipality of Yapacaní (Santa Cruz) regarding a motorbike convoy of EVistas that caused alarm amongst the population.

The general public also feels affected because, *"with the advancement of technology, most [people] feel that their rights are being infringed upon and [that] they lack digital freedoms because they are constantly being monitored, particularly in political contexts*". Furthermore, *"there is a lack of specific legislation [for protection] in cases of digital political harassment*". Added to this are *"disinformation, strategies (…) involving cyberattacks on social media (bots) and a growing drive to monitor social media, all of which undermine digital freedoms*". Meanwhile, in the run-up to the country's second round of elections, Bolivia Verifica and

Chequea Bolivia, two Bolivian fact-checking platforms, faced smear campaigns and threats in response to their work documenting disinformation during the elections. Bolivia Verifica "identified 442 messages of disinformation on social media between January and August 2025, highlighting the growing political polarisation and the crucial role of fact-checkers during elections". Furthermore, ahead of the sub-national elections in March 2026, "the election-specialist 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".

In the same vein, the European Union Election Observation Mission warned that, during the run-up to the national elections, social media – fuelled by campaigns on TikTok and AI-generated disinformation – played a key role in political communication. The TSE's monitoring unit, although limited in scope, identified numerous cases of hate speech, disinformation and breaches of digital regulations.

In January 2026, a government cybersecurity report identified three 'bot farms' linked to digital warriors aligned with the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), operating from Cochabamba, La Paz, El Alto and Sucre via the TikTok and Facebook platforms at an estimated cost of 140,000 dollars, to spread disinformation narratives. In this context, *"there are no guarantees because the state has no control over the major social media corporations*". At the same time, there is a perception that *"social media platforms are regulated by the state [and that] it is easy for them to access personal data. [That is why] there is a sense of insecurity*".

However, the risk of content removal has been heightened following the tabling of the Bill 066/2025-2026 before the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, which aims to restrict access by journalists and members of the public to public information and documentation. This bill stipulates that those requesting information must guarantee that it does not cause harm to third parties and requires them to assume full responsibility for the information obtained.

The former president of the La Paz Journalists' Association (APLP) commented on this draft bill, stating that "the transparency offices of the public institutions themselves would be the ones to determine whether or not it is feasible to provide a particular piece of information". This raises fears – not only amongst journalists, but also amongst CSOs themselves – that these provisions will be used to remove content that has already been published, as well as to restrict the publication of investigations into unlawful acts committed by public officials.

Consequently, the perception of digital insecurity is linked to polarisation and the rise in violations within the digital environment, such as political harassment, threats and intimidation, cyberbullying and the stigmatisation of journalists, which increased by 42.5 per cent in 2025 compared with the previous year . However, the panel noted that*, "there is also no evidence to confirm or deny the manipulation of information by the state. Activists have been arrested, but these arrests may or may not be due to their online activity*". Digital security and privacy are also seen as **restrictive**, due to the lack of a personal data protection law and the vulnerability to data breaches, cyber-attacks and the misuse of information. Authorities and affiliated groups were accused of attacking the social media profiles of journalists, female politicians and human rights defenders, leaking opponents' communications and criminalising their speech. The panel noted that *"there is manipulation of public opinion through the creation of fake accounts linked to the government*". For example, 36 per cent of the instances of digital political violence against women identified by Lupa Digital's monitoring between February and March 2026 were linked to ideological stereotypes and gender-based disinformation, through smear campaigns that can even be amplified by paid advertising on Facebook costing at least

15,000 bolivianos, as occurred in the case of the former Deputy Minister for Autonomies, Andrea Barrientos.

Furthermore, it was claimed that "*the MAS government has deployed 'digital warriors' to serve only its own interests".* In May 2026, the government launched 'Report Your Evidence', a platform for reporting blockades, conflicts and protest organisers via mobile phones, using photographs and anonymous reports. Against this backdrop, it was alleged that *"the government carries out cyberattacks, and through fake profiles, attacks defenders and [makes] threats against their families*". Added to this are gaps in connectivity and digital capabilities. Inequalities between urban and rural areas, between men and women, and across different generations continue to constrain the exercise of digital rights.

Although the National Plan for Telecommunications and ICT User Literacy, launched by the Telecommunications and Transport Regulation and Oversight Authority (ATT) in 2025, was based on internet coverage of 73 per cent of households by 2024 and a usage rate of 93 per cent among school-age students, these indicators do not guarantee effective digital literacy or the development of critical thinking. This limitation is particularly relevant when it comes to the responsible use of artificial intelligence. Consequently, a gap persists between the formal expansion of connectivity and the actual conditions of access, quality and usage.

Finally, historically marginalised groups face greater restrictions, as *"internet penetration is not optimal, nor is digital literacy. The population's ICT [Information and Communication Technologies] skills are moderate*". Whilst *"there is access to and participation in digital spaces, the ability to reach and receive information is not guaranteed (…). The digital and generational divides must also be taken into account*". Furthermore, *"many barriers to access* persist*, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, there has been a haphazard approach to strengthening [digital] capacities"*, which has had a negative impact on other areas such as education and employment.

Consequently, digital inequalities widen existing gaps and constrain civic participation, which increasingly depends on digital resources, capacities, skills and strategies. Better-funded CSOs based in urban areas utilise digital platforms to raise awareness of demands and exercise social control, whilst rural or community-based CSOs face limitations in producing content, managing campaigns or monitoring public administration online.

C) Recommendations

STATE

- Enter into an institutional pact with civil society that establishes: (i) maximum timeframes and objective criteria for granting and renewing legal status; (ii) clear and non-discretionary rules for the exercise of social control; and (iii) the creation of an autonomous monitoring body, with a budget and powers to document, raise the alarm and trigger immediate responses to abuses of authority, prioritising the protection of indigenous, peasant, environmental, human rights and territorial organisations.

- Reform the RUN-ONG and the VIPFE register to establish objective criteria and maximum time limits that eliminate discretion in the granting of legal status; and adjust the requirements regarding updates, final beneficiaries and statutory amendments to the size, nature and capacities of each CSO.

  However, to ensure that the legal and regulatory framework is not restrictive due to bureaucratic, discretionary and politicised barriers to the registration and renewal of CSOs, there must be a strengthened institutional framework that carries out its work promptly and without political bias.

- The Ministry of Development Planning and the Ministry of Economy and Public Finance should establish a national sustainability mechanism with multi-annual funding and differentiated rules for grassroots and indigenous organisations, including tax regulations compatible with their non-profit nature. The State must facilitate co-financing without monopolising or redirecting all cooperation towards its own agenda, breaking away from the logic of short-term projects and conditional funding that keeps CSOs active but fragile.

- Progress on the Public Information Access Act, in order to promote a model of open government, with open data standards and binding consultation mechanisms for high-impact decisions.

- The Ministry of Communication should implement a strategy of non-stigmatisation and civic education that strengthens recognition of the democratic legitimacy of CSOs, complemented by civic and media literacy campaigns led by the Ministry of Education to promote understanding of protest, social control and citizen participation, with particular attention to young people, indigenous peoples, women and the LGBTIQ+ community.

- Implement, through the Telecommunications and Transport Regulation and Oversight Authority, the Civic Literacy Plan and strengthen the digital environment as a safe space for civic participation, through policies on data protection, the prevention of

political cyberbullying, the fight against disinformation and privacy safeguards for CSOs, journalists and human rights defenders, complemented by accessibility and digital literacy strategies that prioritise rural areas and the most vulnerable groups.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

- Citizen participation must go beyond a consultative role and allow for effective advocacy prior to decision-making, with accountability that includes disaggregated information, traceability of comments and a public response justifying the incorporation or rejection of contributions.
- Collectively promote the restructuring of the social fabric to reclaim civic and empowering space in the country.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

- To provide technical advice on identifying sources alternative to funding for current emerging agendas, in the face of a surge in actions that undermine democracies in the region.
- To take a leap towards sustainable investment, promoting common funding packages across the region to underpin the strengthening of civic spaces that respect rights and freedoms.

ACADEMIA

- Encourage undergraduate and postgraduate research into the implications of the enabling environment within the country, to support the urgent task of reinforcing Bolivia's social fabric.
- To join forces with the government to design public policies that respond to the national reality.

D) Research Process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions which are assessed and aggregated to provide quantitative scores per principle. These scores reflect the degree to which the environment within the country enables or disables the work of civil society. Scores are on a five-category scale defined as: fully disabling (1), disabling (2), partially enabling (3), enabling (4), and fully enabling (5). To complement the scores, this report provides a narrative analysis of the enabling or disabling environment for civil society, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as offering recommendations. The process of drafting the analysis is led by Network Members; the consortium provides quality control and editorial oversight before publication.

For Principle 1 - which evaluates respect for and protection of freedom of association and peaceful assembly - the score integrates data from the CIVICUS Monitor. However, for Principles 2–6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries part of the EUSEE programme are either limited or non-existent. To address this, Network Members convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts once a year. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. **The panel for this report was convened in <month>.** The discussions are supported by secondary sources, such as V-Dem, the Bertelsmann Stiftung Governance Index, the RTI Rating from the Centre for Law and Democracy, and other trusted resources. These sources provide benchmarks for measuring similar dimensions and are complemented by primary data collection and other secondary sources of information available for the country. Guided by these deliberations, the panel assigns scores for each dimension, which the Network Members submit to the Consortium, accompanied by detailed justifications that reflect the country's specific context. To determine a single score per principle, the scores assigned to each dimension are aggregated using a weighted average, reflecting the relative importance of each dimension within the principle. This approach balances diverse perspectives while maintaining a structured and objective evaluation framework.

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