

Bolivia - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Bordered by Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Peru and Chile, Bolivia is renowned for its multicultural and multiethnic society. Bolivia was a part of the Inca Empire before Spanish colonization. As such, independent tribes inhabited most of the territory and have been subject to racial and social segregation. 36 different indigenous languages are spoken.

Official languages: Spanish 60.7%, Quechua 21.2%, Aymara 14.6%, Guarani 0.6%

Ethnic groups: Mestizo (mixed white and Amerindian ancestry) 68%, indigenous 20%, white 5%, cholo 2%, black 1%, other 1%, unspecified 3%; 44% of respondents indicated feeling part of some indigenous group, predominantly Quechua or Aymara

Government: Unitary presidential constitutional republic

-President: Evo Morales

-Vice President: Álvaro García Linera

Death penalty: Abolished

Population: 10,969,649

Life expectancy: 68.2 years

Under-5 mortality: 38 per 1000

Adult literacy: 94.46%



Section 1: Overall Development

The overall development of a country – considering education, health, income, and other factors – is a strong indicator of whether average citizens have a reasonable chance to enjoy social and economic well-being and mobility.

Human Development (UNDP Human Development Index (HDI)) ²



0.674 – Medium Human Development ³

According to the UNDP, Bolivians enjoy a gross national income per capita of \$6,155 and can expect to have on average 13.8 years of schooling. However, other countries with comparable gross national income per capita tend to have a higher HDI.

Section 2: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life



Partially respected ⁴

There have been reports that government security forces arbitrarily kill protesters.

Freedom from disappearance



Respected ⁵

There are no reports of disappearances in Bolivia.

Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment



Largely disrespected ⁶

Various reports have been issued by local and international human rights organizations condemning the Bolivian government for its use of torture and coercion, as well as physical and psychological violence. No public official has ever been found guilty.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Partially respected ⁷

Although there are laws providing for investigation and punishment of internal police abuse and corruption, these laws have not been enforced; in some cases, they have even been suspended.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Largely disrespected⁸

Due to the large burden on the judiciary, the executive and legislative branches have influenced and corrupted the system. Authorities have been known to pressure judges to change their verdict.

Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence



Partially respected⁹

The law prohibits arbitrary interference, but there are known cases where the government failed to respect these provisions.

Section 3: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of speech and press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)¹⁰



Score: 33.88, Rank: 107 / 179 – Partially controlled, limited or intimidated¹¹

Arbitrary arrests against journalists, in addition to government impunity, foster a climate of media censorship throughout the country.

Freedom from academic censorship



Partially respected¹²

Although the government promotes self-censorship, there have been no deliberate governmental restrictions.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Partially respected¹³

Although the constitution provides for such freedoms, civil society groups that are critical of the government face harassment as well as threats of expulsion at the hands of the authorities.

Freedom of religion



Respected¹⁴

The constitution stipulates that the state is independent of all religion and provides for “freedom of thought, spirituality, religion and cult, expressed individually or collectively, in public and in private.”

Freedom of movement



Respected¹⁵

Bolivia’s constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration and repatriation. The government respects those rights, cooperating with the UNHCR to provide protection and assistance to those in need.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Respected¹⁶

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, with a well-established system for doing so.

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{17 18}




3 / 7 – Partly free¹⁹

Even though it was unconstitutional, President Evo Morales was elected for a third term. Independent media outlets have faced threats and pressure from the government authorities following their critiques.

Section 4: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc.


Overall protection of political rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)²⁰

	<p>3 / 7 – Not free²¹</p> <p>Opposition parties claim to have been targeted with criminal investigations, forcing them to flee the country. Corruption remains an important problem.</p>
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Section 5: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.


Transparency and freedom from corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²²

	<p>Score: 33%, Rank: 113 / 175 – Highly corruption²³</p> <p>Even though anti-corruption laws were passed, the police and the different branches of government are known to have skirted or ignored such provisions.</p>
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Section 6: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.


Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis independent investigations of alleged human rights violations

	<p>Largely disrespected²⁴</p> <p>The government has been known to curb dissenting opinion and criticism by creating an environment of hostility, pressure and intimidation.</p>
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Section 7: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Endangered Minorities (*Peoples Under Threat – Minority Rights Group International*)²⁵

	<p>No threat listed – Limited dangers to minorities²⁶</p> <p>According to Minorities Rights Group International, Bolivia does not have any ethnic minorities that face an immediate threat of violence.</p>
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Rights of women (*World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index*)²⁷

	<p>Score: 72.2%, Rank: 30 / 142 – Somewhat unequal rights²⁸</p> <p>Although the constitution guarantees equal rights for women and men, maternal mortality and illiteracy among women are some of the highest rates in the world.</p>
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Rights of Children (*KidsRights Index Overall Score*)²⁹

	<p>Score: 74.7%, Rank: 92 / 165 – Somewhat protected³⁰</p> <p>Bolivia must confront a number of problems: infant mortality, child labor, limited access to education in rural areas, etc.</p>
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Rights of persons with disabilities

	<p>Partially respected³¹</p> <p>Although the government prohibits discrimination and requires many provisions to help persons with disabilities, it is not effectively enforcing these provisions.</p>
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Rights of national/racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)

	<p>Largely disrespected³²</p> <p>Afro-Bolivian community leaders reported that employment discrimination was common and that public officials discriminate. They also report the widespread use of discriminatory language. The government makes little effort to address such discrimination.</p>
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Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Partially respected^{33 34}

Prominent gay rights activists insist the government needs to take further actions to guarantee equal family, education, work and health rights for LGBTI persons and also expressed a need for more comprehensive legislation addressing hate crimes and prostitution.

Section 8: Workers' Rights

Workers' rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining



Respected³⁵

The law prohibits anti-union discrimination and does not allow firing workers for union activity. The law does not require government approval for strikes and allows peaceful strikers to occupy business or government offices.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Partially respected³⁶

Although the law prohibits such activity, it remains a serious problem. There is important lack of enforcement.

Freedom from forced labour for children, and a minimum age of employment



Partially respected³⁷

Minimum age of employment is 14, but children as young as 10 may work if they choose to do so, with permission from their parents. The law states that work should not interfere with education.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Largely disrespected³⁸

Although there is a minimal wage in law, in practice more than 45% of the population lives below the poverty line. Unsafe work conditions are usual.

Right to employment



7.4% - Reasonable unemployment³⁹

As the economy marked a six-year low in 2016, the unemployment rate has risen.

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² The UN Development Program HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone. The HDI can also be used to question national policy choices, asking how two countries with the same level of GNI per capita can end up with different human development outcomes. These contrasts can stimulate debate about government policy priorities. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>

³ "Table 1: Human Development Index and its components, Bolivia" UNDP, based on 2014 or the most recent year available. Accessed June 2, 2017. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

⁴ "BOLIVIA 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265778.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a "disappearance" is different than simple arbitrary detention because a "disappearance" is considered permanent.

⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁰ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 180 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (16 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (37 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (31 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (39 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (57 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.

¹¹ "World Press Freedom Index." Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>.

¹² "BOLIVIA 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265778.pdf>.

¹³ "Bolivia." World Report 2014: Bolivia. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/bolivia>.

¹⁴ "Bolivia." International Religious Freedom Report for 2013. January 1, 2013. Accessed June 2, 2017. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

¹⁵ "Bolivia." World Report 2014: Bolivia. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/bolivia>.

¹⁶ Ibid. World Report 2014: Bolivia.

¹⁷ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free).

¹⁸ Freedom House's Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed Dec. 9, 2014 <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

¹⁹ "Bolivia." Freedom in the World 2014: Bolivia. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/bolivia>.

²⁰ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

²¹ "Bolivia." Freedom in the World 2014: Bolivia. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2 2017. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/bolivia>.

²² Transparency International (TI) publishes a "Corruption Perceptions Index" annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt

²³ "Bolivia." Corruption by Country. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.transparency.org/country/BOL>.

²⁴ "BOLIVIA 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265778.pdf>.

²⁵ The Peoples under Threat assessment by Minority Rights Group International highlights countries most at risk of genocide and mass killing. The ranking is created by compiling data on the known antecedents to genocide or mass political killing. Accessed June 2, 2017 <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.

²⁶ "Bolivia." Peoples under Threat, Minority Rights Group International. 2015, or most recent data. Accessed June, 2017. <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.

²⁷ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights

²⁸ "Bolivia." World Economic Forum. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/economies/>.

²⁹ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable

³⁰ "The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking." The KidsRights Index. Accessed June 2, 2017. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>

³¹ "BOLIVIA 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265778.pdf>.

³² Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁴ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.

³⁵ "BOLIVIA 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265778.pdf>.

³⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁹ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed June 2, 2017. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang-en/index.htm.