

Bolivia 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Bolivia during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists.

The government did not take credible steps to identify or punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

While the constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, the government at times retaliated against media outlets that expressed opinions dissenting from government views by withholding advertising funds or initiating tax investigations.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

According to the domestic nongovernmental organization (NGO) National Union of Institutions for Social Action Work, the rights to freedom of expression and press were consistently violated in relation to journalists' work and human rights. Authorities and political actors allied with the government perpetrated or instigated many of these abuses, which involved physical and psychological aggression, intimidation, and threats of criminal charges.

On July 10, during coverage of a multiparty meeting convened by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, supporters of President Arce attacked a journalist from Radio Kawsachun Coca, closely linked to former President Evo Morales, shouting and pushing her to leave the area.

During former President Morales's "March to Save Bolivia" in September, the Bolivian National Press Association (ANP) reported 22 attacks on the

press. Demonstrators loyal to Morales brutally beat one journalist and harassed another by shouting during a live televised transmission.

In October, supporters of former President Morales, at his request, blocked interstate roads for more than 20 days to protest the government of Arce. The ANP reported 25 physical attacks on journalists by supporters of Morales during the protest. The ANP also reported demonstrators loyal to Morales choked Unitel Television journalist Jürgen Guzmán, attacked journalist Pedro Veizaga with stones, and threatened to burn Veizaga's radio station. Journalist Jorge Abrego was injured by a blast from dynamite allegedly triggered by supporters of Morales.

Journalists whose reporting did not align with the government's agenda faced intimidation from "digital warriors," government-paid individuals who attacked critics of the government on social media. Women journalists were particularly targeted, with reports that 99 percent of the social media messages against them contained digital violence of a sexual nature or other targeting because of their sex. Authorities did not investigate or penalize abuses against journalists.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

In addition to fear of prosecution and harassment, journalists sometimes practiced self-censorship due to fear of losing their jobs or losing access to

government sources.

The law required the government to provide goods and services to all media outlets in a nondiscriminatory manner, but at times the government did not purchase advertisements in certain media outlets because they were considered opposed to the government's policy positions. Media outlets alleged the government pressured news organizations to report favorably on government policies. Media also alleged the government retaliated against news organizations that did not comply with that pressure.

On May 8, the La Paz Journalists' Association accused La Paz Governor Santos Quispe of unjustifiably obstructing for 18 months the approval of new statutes necessary for its operation. The secretary general of the association, Leslie Rojas, a journalist and lawyer, visited the state's notary office a total of 32 times, attempting to finalize the approval. At one point, the legal papers pertaining to the process reportedly disappeared but were later found after the association denounced the local government for losing them.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the freedom of association, the right to organize and bargain collectively, the right to strike for certain workers, prohibited

antiunion discrimination, and required reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The law did not provide these rights for agricultural workers or workers in enterprises with fewer than 20 employees, estimated to be 70 percent of all enterprises. The constitution provided for the right of any working individual to join a union and for the protection of general and solidarity strikes but stipulated a strike could not be indefinite.

Workers could form a union in any private company of 20 or more employees. The law required at least 50 percent of the workforce be in favor, an excessive requirement by international standards. The law required government authorization prior to establishing a union and government confirmation of their elected leadership with the right to force new leadership. It also allowed the government to dissolve unions by administrative fiat and permitted only one union per enterprise. The law also required members of union executive boards be citizens and prohibited certain public employees from forming unions, including the military and police. Some public-sector workers, including teachers, transportation workers, and health-care workers, were legally unionized and actively participated without penalty as members of the Bolivian Workers' Confederation, the country's chief trade union federation.

Collective bargaining and voluntary direct negotiations between employers and workers without government participation were common. Most collective bargaining agreements were restricted to addressing wages.

The law limited the right to strike by requiring three-quarters of workers to call for a strike, by prohibiting strikes in the banking sector, and by imposing compulsory arbitration to end a strike in essential sectors.

The government did not effectively enforce applicable laws, and penalties were less than those for other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

The National Labor Court handled complaints of antiunion discrimination, but its effectiveness was limited by the lengthy time to resolve complaints and cases; labor courts took one year or longer to issue rulings. Although the court ruled in favor of discharged workers in most cases and required their reinstatement, union leaders said problems often were resolved or no longer relevant by the time the court ruled.

The government took criminal actions against union leaders who spoke out against government policies. In January, César Apaza, a coca union leader from the Yungas region of La Paz, pleaded guilty, a common trend among some opposition detainees to secure release, and was granted conditional release from prison after undergoing an abbreviated trial. Apaza was arrested in 2022 for his role in organizing protests against a Movimiento al Socialismo-aligned, unauthorized coca market in Villa El Carmen.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The law provided for a minimum wage for most sectors but not for agricultural workers. The monthly minimum wage was greater than the government's official poverty income.

The law mandated rest periods and required premium pay for work beyond a standard workweek. For men, the official workweek was 48 hours and the workday was eight hours. For women, the law set a 40-hour workweek and prohibited women from working at night. The law stipulated a minimum of 15 days of annual leave. The law mandated that the standards apply uniformly to all industries and sectors.

Occupational Safety and Health

The law mandated that occupational safety and health (OSH) standards apply uniformly to all industries and sectors. OSH standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country. OSH experts did not actively identify unsafe conditions, including responding to workers' OSH complaints. A national tripartite committee of business, labor, and government representatives was responsible for monitoring and improving OSH standards and enforcement. The Ministry of Labor maintained offices

for worker inquiries, complaints, and reports of unfair labor practices and unsafe working conditions, but it was unclear if the offices were effective in regulating working conditions.

The law prohibited dismissing employees for removing themselves from work conditions they deemed hazardous and provided for the Ministry of Labor to mandate the employees be rehired following an inspection.

Extensive use and illegal trade of mercury in gold mining operations led to mercury poisoning in workers in the departments of Beni and La Paz. A December 16 report stated 119 deaths were recorded as of November as a result of informal mining, an “alarming increase” compared with previous years.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcement of minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and could initiate sanctions; however, the number of inspectors was insufficient to provide effective workplace inspection. Penalties for wage and hour violations were commensurate with fraud, and sanctions were regularly applied against violators.

The Ministry of Labor’s Bureau of Occupational Safety had responsibility for the protection of workers’ health and safety. Penalties for OSH violations

were more than those for similar crimes, such as negligence, and were regularly applied against violators. Part-time workers were not covered by wage, hour, and OSH laws.

According to labor law experts, the informal sector constituted between 80 and 90 percent of the economy as of October. Labor laws did not cover informal-sector workers, and the government did not inspect the informal sector.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention, but the government did not always respect the law. The law provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court.

Prolonged pretrial detention was a problem. Complex legal procedures, large numbers of detainees, judicial inefficiency, executive interference, corruption, shortage of public defenders, and inadequate case-tracking mechanisms contributed to trial delays that lengthened pretrial detention

and kept many suspects detained beyond the legal limits for the completion of a trial or the presentation of formal charges.

Lawsuits were frequently used to intimidate opposition lawmakers. Observers noted there was a clear pattern between opposition figures speaking out against the government and shortly thereafter being pressed with charges or called to testify in court. Once tensions between the government and the opposition figure subsided, legal proceedings went dormant. Former interim President Áñez had eight trials pending while she was in prison. Romulo Calvo, former president of the Pro Santa Cruz Committee, a regional civic organization, had nine trials pending.

In June, former interim President Áñez filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights regarding the denial of her right to a trial under a special jurisdiction, a right granted to former presidents by law.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution prohibited all forms of torture, coercion, and physical and emotional violence, but there were credible reports government officials employed them.

NGOs reported police investigations at times relied on torture to procure information and extract confessions. Most abuses reportedly occurred while officials were transferring detainees to police facilities or holding persons in detention. According to reports from NGOs engaged with prison populations, the most common forms of torture for men and women detainees included rape, sensory deprivation, use of improvised tear gas chambers, tasers, asphyxiation, verbal abuse, and threats of violence.

According to human rights activists and the Ombudsperson's Office, authorities used psychological pressure and beatings to force detainees from the political opposition to make confessions or guilty pleas.

On July 31, human rights activists denounced the treatment and health of opposition leader Santa Cruz Governor Luis Camacho, who remained in pretrial detention with steadily declining health in the Chonchocoro maximum security prison in La Paz following his arrest in 2022. In March, in

violation of the sentencing court's order, the director of the National Penitentiary System suspended the transfer of Camacho from La Paz to Santa Cruz where he was to begin his oral testimony, under the pretext of not having received the necessary intelligence to ensure a secure transport.

According to the Ombudsperson's Office, there were no convictions for crimes related to mistreatment and torture during the year.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

Child Marriage

The minimum age for marriage was 16. Parents or guardians needed to approve marriages between adolescents younger than 18. The government enforced the law effectively.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Provision of First Asylum

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The Jewish population numbered fewer than 180. There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.