

Bolivia

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INTRODUCTION

In Bolivia, the controversial departure of President Evo Morales after 13 years in power triggered an unprecedented political crisis. The elections in 2020 and their aftermath ignited protests and tensions that continued into 2023, a year marked by internal conflicts within Morales' party and significant political fallout from the election results. The political crisis intensified already existing societal divisions and created challenges for governance. While deep-rooted social, economic, and political divisions are endemic, Morales' populist style often resorted to divisive rhetoric, resulting in polarizing effects that are still felt today.

The press emerged in the mid-19th century as an intellectual tool for literate elites participating in post-independence state-building. As for broadcast media, Bolivia did not experience the same high levels of media ownership concentration as its neighboring countries. Today, news media are often vulnerable to political instrumentalization due to their dependence on official advertising. Journalists often engage in disseminative journalism, relying heavily on institutional and official sources either as a protective measure against potential government backlash or to mitigate the partisan biases of some media owners in a polarized political climate.

At the time of data collection (2022-2023), the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly impacted newsrooms, leading to staff shortages, increased workloads, layoffs, and overall instability.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The Bolivian journalistic workforce is mainly male, with 64.5% identifying as male and only 35.4% as female. Just 10.2% of journalists identify as indigenous, despite indigenous people making up 40% to 60% of the Bolivian population. Approximately 43% practice a religion, mostly Christianity. The average age of journalists is 43.2 years (Median = 42; SD = 11.3), and over two-thirds (68.8%) hold a university degree, while 9.2% have a postgraduate degree. A notable 91% have formal journalism education, with 87.1% attending university apprenticeships (78.9%) and short-term courses (94.2%) to learn or update journalistic skills.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Bolivian journalists primarily work in an outlet with a radio (38.4%) and television (31.9%) background, with a smaller portion in online digital media organization (15.7%). A minority is employed in an organization that has traditionally focused on newspaper publishing (5.2%), magazines (5.2%), or news agencies (0.5%). Nearly half of these outlets have a national (47.3%) or transnational (1.3%) reach, while others are regional (29.5%) or local (22%). Journalists work mostly for private, commercially oriented outlets (71.2%), with fewer in public service (4%), state-run (6%), community (3.5%), and non-profit (4.5%) media.

Bolivian journalists are experienced, with a median of 15 years in the profession (Mean = 16.7; SD = 10.6). They tend to hold middle management positions (43.1%) or no managerial roles (21.4%). Over a third are top managers (35.4%) who oversee strategic decisions. Two-thirds of Bolivian journalists (67.1%) work in or manage a specific thematic area or beat.

Regarding labor conditions, Bolivian full-time journalists work 55.8 weekly hours on average (Median = 55; SD = 16.0). Unsurprisingly, half of the journalists frequently experience work-related stress (49.3%), while only 15.2% report never or rarely feeling stressed at work. Less than half hold either a full-time (41.7%) or part-time (5.5%) permanent contract. Additionally, 14.1% have either full or part-time fixed contracts, while a quarter (25.1%) are freelancers or self-employed. Finally, 13.6% work under other non-contractual arrangements.

Only half of the journalists (53.3%) rely solely on journalism for their main income, indicating that the other half have additional jobs or sources of income, primarily in advertising (43.9%), public relations (20.9%), or education (25.1%). However, there is strong collegiality within the profession, as three-quarters (71.3%) belong to a professional association dedicated to journalism.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Attacks on journalists in Bolivia are infrequent, but many express concerns that such crimes go unpunished, with 60.4% sharing this worry. Common types of attacks reported as frequent or very frequent include hateful speech (19%), public discrediting (10.4%), surveillance (10.6%), threats (7.4%), and hacking of digital accounts (7.8%). In contrast, office raids and legal actions are extremely rare.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	401	4.0%	15.0%	42.1%	18.7%	20.2%
Public discrediting of your work	401	1.7%	8.7%	20.7%	21.9%	46.9%
Surveillance	368	2.2%	8.4%	23.4%	24.2%	41.8%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	397	1.3%	6.5%	19.4%	18.1%	54.7%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	378	0.5%	0.0%	1.2%	4.0%	94.3%
Legal actions against you because of your work	337	0.2%	1.5%	5.0%	9.2%	84.0%
Stalking	395	0.8%	4.3%	18.7%	23.8%	52.4%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	401	1.2%	6.2%	24.4%	25.9%	42.1%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	401	0.0%	0.7%	3.2%	6.0%	90.0%
Other physical attacks	401	0.7%	2.7%	10.7%	20.4%	65.3%
Coercion	400	0.8%	1.0%	12.3%	16.8%	69.3%
Questioning of your personal morality	400	2.0%	4.5%	20.0%	29.5%	44.0%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	393	0.5%	2.3%	10.7%	18.3%	68.2%
Others disseminating your personal information	390	0.0%	3.8%	14.1%	24.1%	57.9%
Workplace bullying	271	1.0%	2.5%	13.0%	16.0%	67.6%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	337	0.2%	0.5%	4.0%	11.2%	84.0%

Question: "In the last five years, how often have you experienced any of the following actions related to your work as a journalist?"

TABLE 2. WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Worried about losing job in journalism within the next 12 months	394	13.2%	3.16	1.21
Concerned about physical well-being	399	14.3%	3.30	1.23
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	399	18.5%	3.62	1.01
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Bolivia go unpunished	401	60.6%	4.57	0.60

Question: "Thinking about your work, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ROLES

The most endorsed roles by respondents include discussing future implications of current affairs (96.5%), promoting peace and tolerance (94.8%), shedding light on social issues (93.8%), and combating disinformation (91.3%). Following closely is educating audiences (89%), acting as a detached observer (87.3%), and offering multiple viewpoints (86.8%). Maintaining political neutrality and providing analysis of current events are also valued at 86.3%.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	400	87.3%	4.09	0.81
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	398	73.1%	3.84	0.98
Shine a light on society's problems	401	93.8%	4.47	0.70
Motivate people to participate in politics	395	19.0%	2.38	1.18
Provide analysis of current affairs	401	86.3%	4.13	0.80
Let people express their views	401	86.8%	4.25	0.72
Provide information people need to form political opinion	400	70.3%	3.78	1.21
Advocate for social change	398	82.7%	4.13	0.92
Influence public opinion	398	56.5%	3.48	1.11
Set the political agenda	397	33.5%	2.88	1.19
Promote peace and tolerance	401	94.8%	4.48	0.68
Educate the audience	401	89.0%	4.31	0.77
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	399	83.7%	4.11	0.85
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	394	67.8%	3.73	1.17
Support national development	400	84.5%	4.09	0.81
Support government policy	392	49.5%	3.33	1.08
Convey a positive image of political leaders	395	5.8%	1.73	0.96
Provide entertainment and relaxation	400	36.0%	2.99	1.15
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	401	74.8%	3.97	0.90
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	398	71.4%	3.87	0.87
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	400	72.5%	3.92	0.95
Support efforts to protect public health	401	79.1%	3.98	0.82
Counteract disinformation	400	91.3%	4.33	0.74
Discuss future implications of current events	400	96.5%	4.61	0.59

Question: "Please tell me how important it is to do each of the following in your daily work." (Scale: 5 = Extremely important; 4 = Very important; 3 = Moderately important; 2 = Slightly important; 1 = Not at all important.)

JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

Bolivian journalists exhibit a mixture of epistemological orientations, with 85.8% agreeing that “facts speak for themselves” and 78.9% believing in the possibility of objectivity. In contrast, 79.8% support the idea of interpreting facts, and 81.3% feel it is important to alert others to untruthful claims. Furthermore, about four in ten journalists acknowledge that it is impossible to completely set aside their beliefs when reporting.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	401	79.8%	3.90	0.91
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	398	12.3%	2.15	0.96
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	400	39.0%	2.96	1.01
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	397	69.0%	3.60	1.11
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	399	78.9%	3.87	0.91
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	401	28.7%	2.68	1.09
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	408	85.8%	3.98	0.74
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	400	63.0%	3.52	1.17
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	395	81.3%	3.96	0.98

Questions: “The following statements deal with beliefs related to how journalists know what they know. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree.” / “Using the same scale, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following beliefs.” (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Journalists generally favor absolute ethical values, with 91.5% adhering to profession-driven standards over extraordinary circumstances (40.7%), personal judgment (31.1%), or specific situations (18.3%). Regarding controversial reporting methods, nearly half (48.4%) occasionally justify practices like using hidden recording devices, while about a third support unauthorized use of personal materials from powerful individuals (35.4%) or confidential documents (33.3%). However, there's minimal support for accepting money from sources.

TABLE 5. ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
What is ethical for journalists should always be determined by professional standards regardless of situation and personal judgment	401	91.5%	4.44	0.77
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	398	40.7%	2.92	1.26
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	399	18.3%	2.18	1.09
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	399	31.1%	2.47	1.29

Question: “The following statements describe different responses journalists may have to ethical problems. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree.” (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

TABLE 6. JUSTIFICATION OF CONTROVERSIAL REPORTING METHODS

	N	Always justified	Justified on occasion
Claiming to be somebody else	398	0.8%	16.1%
Using hidden recording devices	399	2.3%	48.4%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	396	3.3%	33.3%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	393	3.6%	35.4%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	398	0.8%	20.1%
Paying people for confidential information	397	1.0%	29.2%
Accepting money from sources	401	0.0%	0.7%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	397	0.8%	19.6%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	401	1.3%	23.7%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	398	0.8%	23.7%

Question: “Which of the following, if any, do you think may be always justified, or justified on occasion, and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?”

EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Three quarters (73.8%) of those surveyed feel they have a great deal or complete freedom in selecting the information they cover, while only 4.2% feel restricted. Similarly, 73.3% believe they have significant freedom in choosing news aspects to highlight, with only 5.4% reporting little or no freedom. In contrast, just 17% think there is great or complete freedom in their country, and 42.3% believe press freedom is either nonexistent or limited.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	401	73.8%	4.13	0.91
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	401	73.3%	4.03	0.91
Media freedom in Bolivia	397	13.4%	2.77	0.85

(Scale: 5 = Complete freedom; 4 = A great deal of freedom; 3 = Some freedom; 2 = Little freedom; 1 = No freedom at all.)

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

The main influence on Bolivian journalists is ethics, cited by 88.5%. Access to information is also significant for 66.2%. Other influences include personal values (56%), resource availability (45.5%), audience feedback (44.4%), and editors and supervisors (42%). Friends, colleagues, religious groups, and the military are considered important by fewer than 5% of respondents.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	399	19.0%	2.48	1.05
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	376	42.0%	3.03	1.18
The business managers of the news organization	381	23.1%	2.40	1.24
The owners of the news organization	381	27.6%	2.56	1.35
Editorial policy	390	37.9%	2.89	1.27
Advertising considerations	394	25.4%	2.47	1.28
Profit expectations	396	14.9%	2.14	1.14
Audience research and data	399	35.8%	3.00	1.10
Availability of news-gathering resources	400	45.5%	3.21	1.08
Time limits	401	39.4%	3.04	1.11
Journalism ethics	401	88.5%	4.28	0.83
Self-censorship	396	23.0%	2.43	1.23
Personal values and beliefs	399	55.9%	3.44	1.30
Colleagues in other media	401	4.7%	1.85	0.86
Friends, acquaintances and family	401	5.0%	1.79	0.87
Feedback from the audience	401	44.4%	3.27	0.97
Competing news organizations	400	18.3%	2.56	1.06
Media laws and regulation	396	35.9%	3.02	1.11
Access to information	400	62.7%	3.66	0.97
Government censorship	396	28.5%	2.55	1.32
Government officials	397	20.4%	2.24	1.26
Politicians	395	14.4%	2.06	1.20
Business people	398	10.1%	1.97	1.04
Public relations	397	8.1%	2.02	0.96
Relationships with news sources	401	6.5%	3.02	1.09
Police	399	7.0%	1.77	0.97
Issue advocacy groups	398	5.5%	1.80	0.93
Religious groups and institutions	399	4.0%	1.59	0.86
Military	400	3.3%	1.48	0.81

Question: "Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work as a journalist." (Scale: 5 = Extremely influential; 4 = Very influential; 3 = Moderately influential; 2 = Slightly influential; 1 = Not at all influential.)