

Bangladesh

Country Focus Report

2025



Credit: Mr. Arafat Karim

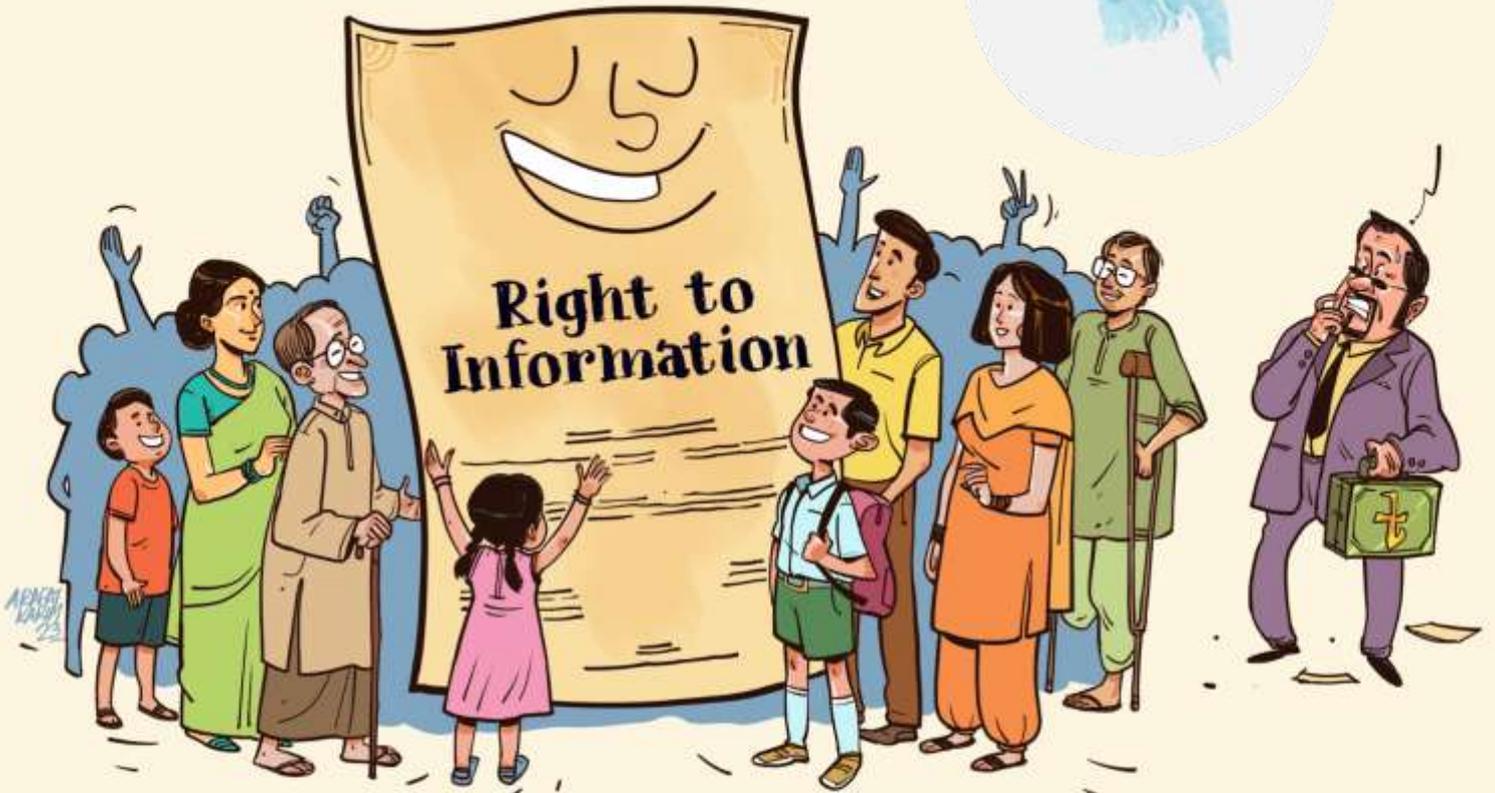


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A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

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:

SIX ENABLING PRINCIPLES

-  **Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms**
-  **Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework**
-  **Accessible and Sustainable Resources**
-  **Open and Responsive State**
-  **Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society**
-  **Access to a Secure Digital Environment**

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.

Brief Overview of the Country Context

Bangladesh is undergoing a complex political transition following the [collapse of long-standing rule](#) of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League-led government in August 2024. After parliamentary elections in January 2024 whose [credibility was widely questioned](#), protests initially triggered by opposition to public-sector job quotas escalated into a broader anti-government movement amid allegations of democratic backsliding and repression. The demonstrations intensified over several weeks and were met with deadly force, before culminating in Sheikh Hasina's resignation and flight from the country in early August 2024, effectively [ending her government's tenure](#) and creating a political vacuum. In the aftermath, President Mohammed Shahabuddin announced the formation of an interim administration and pledged new elections and political reforms. An interim government led by Professor Muhammad Yunus [took office](#) in August 2024 with a mandate to stabilise the political environment and guide the transition towards a renewed democratic process. While the transition has reduced some of the most overt forms of repression associated with the previous period, significant structural challenges persist, and democratic institutions continue to evolve under conditions of uncertainty.

This report covers the period of October 2024 to October 2025. Politically, the interim administration operates without a direct electoral mandate. It relies on broad reform legitimacy to push forward changes in governance, anti-corruption oversight and electoral reforms. Several prominent civil society leaders have been appointed to [advisory roles](#) and [reform commissions](#), especially in areas such as anti-corruption, women's affairs and [political consensus building](#). However, the independence of civil society actors has been a subject of debate, as engagement with government simultaneously creates opportunities and raises questions about autonomy and co-optation.

Economically, Bangladesh has experienced both growth and strain. While the [ready-made garments sector](#) remains a key engine of export earnings and employment, macroeconomic vulnerabilities have increased with inflationary pressures and declining foreign exchange reserves. The [withdrawal of USAID funding](#) in early 2025 removed hundreds of millions of dollars from the development sector, disrupting programmes and forcing layoffs in rights-based and development organisations. This funding shock exposed the sector's deep dependency on foreign donors and highlighted the absence of robust domestic fundraising mechanisms.

Socially, Bangladesh remains unequal and fragmented. While urban centres like Dhaka and Chattogram often receive disproportionate policy attention and media representation, rural

populations, Indigenous communities, religious minorities and gender-diverse groups continue to face structural exclusion. Access to quality education, healthcare and social services varies widely across regions, and societal norms around religion, gender and caste shape patterns of [inclusion and marginalisation](#).

Internet access and digital connectivity have expanded significantly, but this expansion has occurred alongside concerns [over surveillance and data governance](#). Recent reforms such as the Cyber Protection Ordinance 2025, the Personal Data Protection Ordinance 2025 and the National Data Governance Ordinance 2025 have updated the digital legal framework. However, they have also raised [concerns](#) among rights advocates about broad executive powers and not enough accountability.

Across these political, economic and social domains, civil society in Bangladesh operates in a dynamic but constrained environment. Formal freedoms are recognised in law, but their exercise is shaped by administrative discretion, regulatory complexity, social stigma and uneven access to resources.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: (Repressed) ¹



The [Constitution of Bangladesh](#) recognises freedom of association, assembly and expression. However, in practice, these freedoms remain subject to serious and sustained restrictions. Bangladesh's civic space is currently classified as “repressed” by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#). This classification reflects the continued use of restrictive laws, intimidation and violence against journalists, activists and protesters, despite reform initiatives undertaken [after the political transition](#) of 2024. It also indicates serious and sustained restrictions on fundamental civic freedoms such as association, assembly and expression. Civic actors face recurring legal ambiguity, bureaucratic hurdles and administrative discretion that hinder full realisation of constitutional rights. The classification follows years of narrow civic space prior to [2024](#), during which critical voices and rights organisations faced arrests, restrictive laws and operational pressure.

1.1 Freedom of Association

Freedom of association in Bangladesh remains formally recognised under [Article 38 of the Constitution](#). Various civil society groups can associate, including formally registered non-governmental organisations, voluntary associations, professional and cultural groups, faith-based organisations, trade unions and informal community-based platforms. However, in practice, this freedom is unevenly exercised and highly contingent on the political sensitivity of the issue, the identity of the organisers and the location of activities.

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

There is no formal legal prohibition on the formation of civil society organisations in Bangladesh. However, organisations that work on politically or socially stigmatised issues – particularly those representing [LGBTQIA+ communities](#), religious minorities, or secular and pluralist traditions – [face disproportionate barriers](#) to formal registration and recognition. They are often compelled to operate informally or under alternative mandates to mitigate legal and security risks.

Beyond formal law, informal modes of interference further restrict associational space. The experience of civil society organisations (CSOs) and community groups indicates heightened surveillance, unsolicited phone calls, pressure from local political actors and warnings discouraging collaboration on “sensitive” issues. Cultural collectives, student platforms, Baul groups, shrine-centred associations, and organisations working with religious or gender minorities have faced disproportionate scrutiny. [Attacks on Baul](#) communities and shrines in recent years, and the intimidation of [cultural practitioners](#) associated with pluralist traditions, have reinforced perceptions that collective organising outside dominant narratives carries tangible risk.

These pressures have contributed to widespread self-censorship and risk-avoidant behaviour within civil society. Many organisations now limit coalition building, avoid joint statements or reframe associational activities as service delivery to reduce exposure. Though association is not prohibited and many groups continue to form and function, the environment remains structurally constrained by a combination of legal overhang, discretionary enforcement and informal coercion. This is particularly notable for rights-based, minority-focused and advocacy-oriented associations.

1.2 Freedom of Assembly

Freedom of assembly in Bangladesh remains constitutionally protected by [Article 37](#), but in practice it is exercised under significant constraints, particularly when assemblies involve political dissent, media freedom, minority rights, or challenges to dominant social or religious narratives. In 2025, public gatherings were not banned completely. However, assemblies perceived as critical or sensitive were frequently met with intimidation, disruption or post-event reprisals, creating a climate of deterrence rather than outright prohibition.

A defining feature of the current environment is selective tolerance. Assemblies aligned with state narratives or framed as non-political are generally permitted, whereas protests, vigils, cultural events or demonstrations linked to accountability, freedom of expression or [minority protection](#) face obstruction. Organisers routinely report difficulties in obtaining permissions, last-minute cancellations by authorities, or pressure to relocate or scale down events, especially outside major urban centres.

Several high-profile incidents illustrate these dynamics. In March 2025, leaders of the National Garment Workers’ Federation (NGWF) were unlawfully detained after factory-level protests [over unpaid wages and dismissals](#). Security forces subsequently raided the union’s office in Savar, seizing documents and vandalising the premises. This shows the use of force and intimidation against labour-related assemblies. In December 2025, after the death of student and youth movement leader Sharif Osman Hadi, large-scale [protests](#) erupted across Dhaka and other districts, during which assemblies escalated into mob violence targeting institutions associated with public discourse and dissent. Violent groups vandalised and set fire to the offices of [Prothom Alo and The Daily Star](#), forcing the suspension of publication and the evacuation of journalists. Law-enforcement agencies intervened only

after significant damage had occurred, which raises concerns about delayed protection during mass mobilisation.

In November 2025, a peaceful human chain organised by Baul artists and supporters in Manikganj, after the arrest of Baul singer Abul Sarkar, was [violently attacked by counter-protesters](#), resulting in serious injuries. Despite police presence, intervention was delayed until after the violence escalated. This reinforces concerns that assemblies linked to cultural pluralism and minority expression are inadequately protected even when they are conducted peacefully. Such incidents illustrate how assemblies connected to dissent, cultural expression or minority identity face heightened risk of disruption and violence, compounded by delayed or ineffective state response and limited accountability for perpetrators. Women's rights and gender-justice assemblies have also encountered restrictions.

During mobilisations responding to [backlash against gender](#) equality initiatives in 2025, some public rallies were [mischaracterised by Islamist](#) groups as linked to LGBTQIA+ activism, which triggered hostility and discouraged participation. This framing not only exposed participants to social risk, but also led to increased monitoring of subsequent assemblies.

Legal and administrative tools continue to underpin these constraints. Broad public order provisions, coupled with the lingering threat of laws such as [Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure](#), the [provisions of the Police Act 1861](#) and [the Anti-Terrorism Act](#), allow authorities wide discretion to intervene before, during or after assemblies. Mass arrests or blanket bans were not common during the assessment period. However, the anticipation of punitive consequences, including surveillance, questioning or future permit denial, has significantly reduced the turnout and frequency of assemblies on sensitive issues.

Overall, freedom of assembly exists in form but is fragile in practice. Peaceful gatherings are tolerated selectively, and the cumulative impact of intimidation, legal ambiguity and post-assembly repercussions has produced widespread self-restraint among organisers and participants. This environment undermines the ability of civil society to use assembly as a meaningful tool for collective expression, accountability and solidarity.

1.3 Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression, though protected under [Article 39 of the Constitution](#), has faced the most visible and alarming setbacks. In particular, press freedom has been under threat, without protection from government. For instance, on 18 to 19 December 2025, mobs [attacked and set fire](#) to the offices of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, Bangladesh's two largest independent newspapers. Printing operations were disrupted, and journalists were forced to work under heightened security concerns. These attacks marked one of the most serious assaults on press freedom in recent years and sent a powerful message that critical journalism can provoke violent retaliation. The authorities' response to these attacks was widely criticised as delayed and inadequate. Security forces arrived only after extensive damage had occurred and no prompt, transparent accountability was established for those responsible. This reinforces perceptions of state failure to protect press freedom during periods of unrest.

Shortly afterward, Global TV Bangladesh was explicitly [threatened](#) by individuals who identified themselves as part of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement. They warned that the channel would be "set on fire in the same way" as Prothom Alo and The Daily Star if it did not remove its head of news. This explicit reference to earlier attacks illustrates how

violence against one media outlet becomes a coercive benchmark, amplifying fear across the media sector.

Journalists have also been targeted directly through arrests and criminal prosecution for their professional activities. In December 2025, veteran journalist Anis Alamgir was [arrested](#) and charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act over public commentary critical of political developments. Journalists' associations and rights organisations condemned the case as an abuse of counterterrorism legislation against journalism. They warned that such prosecutions undermine due process and reinforce legal intimidation of the media. These cases reflect a broader pattern of intimidation. Monitoring by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) recorded [398 incidents](#) of attack or harassment against journalists between August 2024 and March 2025, affecting 218 journalists in the first seven months of 2025 alone. Transparency International Bangladesh further reported that [496 journalists faced harassment](#) between August 2024 and July 2025, including [266 journalists named as defendants in murder cases](#) related to the July uprising, despite the absence of convictions. This highlights the routine use of severe criminal charges to silence critical reporting.

Women journalists and commentators have faced additional, gendered forms of harassment that combine professional intimidation with personal and moral attacks. In December 2025, [senior journalist Naznin Munni](#) was subjected to sustained online abuse, public vilification and threats after her critical commentary on political developments. The attacks targeted not only her journalism, but also her character and gender, amplifying risks for women in the media and contributing to a hostile environment that discourages women's participation in public discourse.

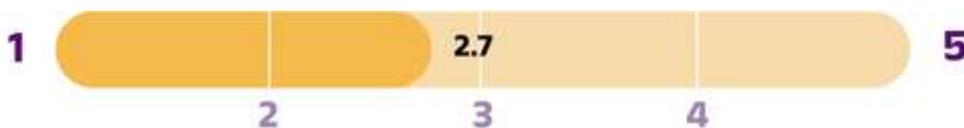
Cultural and religious expression has also been under sustained pressure. There have been repeated attacks on Sufi shrines and pluralist religious sites, undermining spaces that are historically associated with tolerance and cultural diversity. In November 2025, Baul artist Abul Sarkar was arrested, which triggered protests by fellow Bauls and cultural activists. The protests were met with [intimidation and violence](#), reinforcing the vulnerability of Baul traditions that have long been associated with social critique and nonconformist expression.

On a somewhat positive note, the absence of systematic internet shutdowns or mass arrests marks a departure from [earlier authoritarian practices](#). However, this improvement is offset by the normalisation of intimidation and selective violence as tools to silence dissent. Civic actors continue to operate under conditions of uncertainty, where exercising fundamental freedoms often carries legal, physical or reputational risks. This reality underscores the urgent need for legal reform, credible accountability for attacks on media and cultural actors, and clear safeguards to prevent the misuse of security laws against peaceful civic activity.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



Bangladesh's legal and regulatory framework allows CSOs to exist and operate, but it remains highly centralised, discretionary and control-oriented. Recent procedural adjustments have marginally improved efficiency. However, the underlying legal architecture continues to privilege state oversight over associational freedom, limiting predictability, autonomy and equal access, particularly for rights-based and grassroots organisations.

2.1 Registration

CSO registration in Bangladesh is governed primarily by the [FDRA](#), alongside other statutes such as the [Societies Registration Act 1860](#), the [Trust Act 1882](#), the [Companies Act 1994](#), the [Microcredit Regulatory Authority Act 2006](#) and the [Waqfs Ordinance 1962](#) for domestic legal identity. Any organisation that intends to receive foreign funding must register with the [NGO Affairs Bureau \(NGOAB\)](#) – a government regulatory bureau set up in 1990 and housed under the Prime Minister's Office – under the FDRA. In this framework, NGOAB approval is required for registration/renewal and project authorisation. Banks may not disburse foreign donations without NGOAB permission, which makes bureau approval functionally indispensable for most foreign-funded CSOs. As an executive bureau under the Prime Minister's Office (rather than an independent commission), NGOAB does not operate with formal structural guarantees of independence. Its processes may incorporate security-related inputs from other executive authorities.

In the past year, the government introduced limited procedural reforms. These include shortening the statutory processing period for NGOAB registration from [180 working days to 45](#) and reducing security vetting by two agencies, the Ministry of Home Affairs and National Security Intelligence (NSI), to [a single-agency review](#). According to official statements, scrutiny is now limited to organisational objectives rather than [political affiliation](#). These changes have improved clarity on paper but have not reduced discretionary authority in practice. A notable and positive legal development is the amendment to [Section 14 of the](#)

[FDRA](#), which removed language allowing punitive action against CSOs for making “derogatory” or “obscene” remarks about the Constitution or constitutional institutions. This amendment addresses one of the most subjective and abuse-prone provisions of the law and represents a meaningful step towards strengthening protections for peaceful expression and advocacy. However, implementation remains uneven, and NGOAB continues to retain broad discretion to delay or deny registration and project approval, without providing detailed or transparent reasoning.

Under the FDRA regime administered by the NGO Affairs Bureau, registration and follow-up processes are centralised in Dhaka. This puts travel, cost and information burdens on organisations based in remote areas. Smaller CSOs report difficulty navigating documentation requirements and responding to repeated clarification requests, often without clear timelines. As mentioned and based on experience on the ground, CSOs working on politically sensitive issues, such as Indigenous rights, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, labour rights or governance, can register legally. However, they face heightened scrutiny and prolonged delays, particularly when they expand operations to areas like the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The FDRA also provides for appeal mechanisms in law. CSOs may appeal adverse decisions of the NGO Affairs Bureau under [Section 15 of the FDRA](#), submit administrative representations to the NGOAB or the Prime Minister’s Office, or seek judicial review before the High Court under [Article 102 of the](#) Constitution. In practice, these remedies are slow, costly and lack independence, as appeals remain within the executive framework and rarely provide timely relief. This reinforces compliance over contestation.

2.2 Operational Environment

CSOs are legally permitted to operate, but day-to-day functioning is heavily constrained by layered approvals, reporting obligations and bureaucratic risk-aversion. For instance, [Section 9](#) of the FDRA requires all foreign donations to be received through a designated bank account. This is commonly referred to as a [“mother account”](#) and is opened and operated by the CSO itself at a scheduled bank. While CSOs formally hold and manage these accounts, banks are legally prohibited from releasing or transferring funds without explicit project-specific approval from the NGO Affairs Bureau. Bangladesh Bank mandates commercial banks to regularly share transaction data related to these accounts with NGOAB and the Economic Relations Division, so that routine financial operations are linked to continuous regulatory oversight.

As a result, all NGO projects involving foreign funds require government approval, not only at inception through [FD-6 approval](#) – the mandatory NGO Affairs Bureau application for authorising foreign-funded projects under the FDRA – but repeatedly during implementation. CSOs must submit detailed financial and narrative reports to NGOAB, typically every quarter and annually. Delays in the review of reports routinely stall fund release, even for previously approved projects. In practice, CSOs report delays of three to four months in routine fund disbursement, which forces organisations to pre-finance activities from their own reserves. This disproportionately affects smaller and regional CSOs and weakens operational sustainability.

Sanctions for non-compliance include suspension of fund release, project cancellation and potential deregistration, as provided under the FDRA. In particular, [Section 9](#) enables the withholding of fund disbursement through NGOAB control over bank releases.

A significant regulatory development occurred in late 2025 with the adoption of the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance 2025, which was [approved](#) by the Advisory Council in November 2025 and gazetted in December 2025, when it entered into force. The ordinance introduces limited procedural easing within the existing FDRA framework, most notably by allowing foreign donations of up to 50 lakh Bangladeshi taka (US\$40,551) per year to be received [without prior project-specific approval](#) from the NGOAB. The amendment also aims to [simplify some registration](#) and reporting procedures and reduce administrative delays in fund release.

If implemented consistently, this change could ease liquidity constraints for smaller and locally based CSOs by reducing delays associated with routine fund approvals for low-value donations. However, the amendment does not alter the core regulatory architecture of the FDRA. NGOAB retains authority over registration, project approval for larger or multi-year grants, reporting compliance and the imposition of sanctions. As such, while the ordinance represents a modest shift towards procedural facilitation, it does not substantially reduce discretionary oversight over foreign-funded civil society activity.

2.3 Protection from Interference

Legal protections against interference with civil society organisations (CSOs) in Bangladesh remain weak, fragmented and heavily qualified by executive discretion. While CSOs are not subject to routine or automatic dissolution, no comprehensive legal framework exists that clearly protects organisations from arbitrary suspension, deregistration or administrative interference. Instead, safeguards are dispersed across sectoral laws and are frequently overridden by broad public order and security provisions.

Under the [FDRA](#), CSOs registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau may face suspension of activities or cancellation of registration on several grounds. A notable positive development during the assessment period is the [amendment](#) to Section 14 of the FDRA, which removed language allowing punitive action against organisations for making vague or subjective “derogatory” remarks about the Constitution or constitutional institutions. This reform addresses one of the most abuse-prone elements of the law and strengthens legal protections for peaceful expression and advocacy. CSOs registered under other legal regimes, such as the Societies Registration Act 1860, the Trust Act 1882 and the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance 1961, similarly lack explicit statutory protections against politically motivated dissolution. Instead, they rely on general constitutional remedies that are costly and slow to pursue.

Bangladeshi law does not provide strong, explicit safeguards protecting CSOs from informal or third-party interference, including harassment, intimidation or obstruction by non-state actors. Where such interference occurs, for example, with organisations working on governance, labour rights, Indigenous rights, LGBTQIA+ inclusion or cultural pluralism, state protection has often been delayed or inadequate. International observers have repeatedly noted the absence of consistent accountability for attacks against civil society and cultural actors, which weakens practical protection even where formal rights exist.

Legal provisions governing inspections, audits and monitoring of CSOs, particularly under the FDRA, grant broad powers to executive authorities without clearly defined thresholds, timelines or proportionality safeguards. Oversight by the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) includes project-level scrutiny, reporting reviews and fund-release approvals. In practice, these can function as continuous administrative interventions rather than neutral compliance

monitoring. Civil society assessments note that repeated clarification requests, prolonged review cycles and ad hoc inquiries create operational uncertainty and can serve as indirect tools of control or surveillance, especially in the absence of independent oversight.

In practice, CSOs rarely face formal dissolution but operate under persistent risk of suspension, delayed approvals or punitive administrative action for minor procedural lapses. The credible possibility of registration cancellation or fund blockage, combined with limited interim remedies, has produced a compliance-oriented environment in which organisations narrow programming, avoid coalition-building and limit public advocacy to reduce exposure.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



Civil society in Bangladesh continues to face structural constraints in accessing, using and sustaining financial resources driven by regulatory control, donor dependency and uneven capacity across the sector. Funding is not legally prohibited but practical access and long-term sustainability remain fragile, particularly for rights-based, regional and advocacy-oriented organisations.

3.1 Accessibility of Resources

Access to financial resources has become increasingly constrained in practice, despite the absence of an outright legal ban on funding. Bangladeshi CSOs remain overwhelmingly dependent on foreign donors. This vulnerability was sharply exposed in early 2025 when the global withdrawal of USAID resulted in an estimated [US\\$500–700 million reduction](#) in civil society funding. This shock forced widespread project closures, layoffs and the suspension of rights-based programming across the country.

Foreign funding is legally permitted under the [FDRA](#), but access is highly regulated and conditional. All foreign donations must be approved through [the FD-6 process](#), received via a designated [“mother account”](#), and released only with NGOAB authorisation. Even after project approval, CSOs must obtain clearance for each tranche of fund disbursement. In practice, these layered approvals create systemic delays, often lasting several months, that particularly affect smaller and regional organisations.

Access is also uneven across the sector. Dhaka-based NGOs with established donor relationships and professional grant-management capacity are better positioned to navigate complex compliance requirements. In contrast, rural and grassroots CSOs face barriers related to language, digital literacy, proposal complexity and limited access to donor information, which effectively excludes them from many international funding opportunities.

Domestic funding remains legally permissible but structurally discouraged. While the government does provide funding to CSOs, this support is largely confined to service-delivery partnerships in sectors such as health, education, disaster response and social welfare. It does not extend meaningfully to independent, rights-based or advocacy-oriented organisations. Bangladesh's tax regime offers no meaningful incentives for philanthropic giving and private-sector contributions remain limited due to compliance concerns and reputational risk. As a result, alternative funding streams are largely inaccessible for most CSOs. Where domestic funding is available from either government or private sources, it is heavily concentrated in non-contentious sectors. In contrast, organisations that work on anti-corruption, human rights, media freedom, governance reform and minority rights have extremely limited access to domestic resources.

In November 2025, the government adopted and [subsequently gazetted](#) the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance 2025, allowing foreign donations of up to [50 lakh](#) Bangladeshi taka (US\$40,551) [per year](#) to be received without prior project-specific approval from the NGO Affairs Bureau. While this reform introduces procedural easing in the existing framework, its practical impact on day-to-day funding access for most CSOs remains limited, as core approval, reporting and oversight requirements continue to apply.

Taken together, funding is technically available but functionally constrained, unevenly distributed and increasingly unreliable. This places accessibility within a disabling environment.

3.2 Effectiveness of Resources

CSOs are generally able to use funds for their intended purposes, but the effectiveness of resource utilisation varies significantly depending on organisational size, donor relationships and funding source. International donors typically impose [strict reporting, monitoring and burn-rate](#) requirements. These conditions are rooted in accountability rather than interference. Most donors show willingness to adjust timelines or activities when security or contextual risks are communicated credibly. However, this flexibility is uneven. Larger CSOs with established reputations are more likely to negotiate flexibility, while smaller organisations experience donor conditions as [rigid constraints](#) that limit adaptation and innovation.

Local donor dynamics further complicate effectiveness. Some domestic funding intermediaries apply additional procedural layers or prioritise preferred networks, which creates informal hierarchies within civil society. This affects decision-making autonomy and reduces equal participation in programme design and implementation.

Overall, donor-CSO relationships tend to be hierarchical rather than [fully collaborative](#), particularly for small and regional organisations. Nevertheless, there is no evidence of systematic donor-driven interference aimed at suppressing civic work. Resources can generally be used as intended. However, flexibility and effectiveness are unevenly distributed, which can be characterised as partially enabling.

3.3 Sustainability of Resources

The sustainability of civil society financing in Bangladesh remains structurally fragile, shaped by high donor dependency, short funding cycles and limited opportunities for diversification.

While the legal environment does not formally prohibit CSOs from pursuing alternative revenue sources, the absence of robust domestic funding streams and the predominance of project-based external grants undermine long-term organisational resilience. Most CSOs rely on time-bound, donor-funded projects and rarely receive multi-year or core funding. This funding model constrains strategic planning, weakens institutional memory and limits investment in staff development, governance systems and long-term programming. As a result, organisational sustainability is closely tied to donor continuity rather than to [stable domestic support](#) or accumulated reserves.

The withdrawal and scaling down of [USAID funding](#) provided a clear illustration of these vulnerabilities. USAID had been a major source of support for governance, democracy, labour rights and civil society strengthening initiatives in Bangladesh. When programmes were suspended or phased out, many CSOs experienced abrupt funding gaps, leading to staff layoffs, downsizing of operations and the premature termination of ongoing activities. Smaller and mid-sized organisations, which lacked financial buffers or alternative donors, were disproportionately affected. This reinforced consolidation around a limited number of larger, well-connected NGOs.

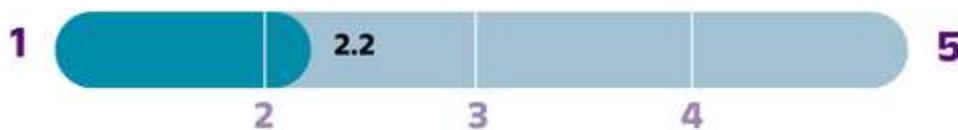
The episode underscored the extent to which civil society sustainability in Bangladesh depends on a narrow set of external funding sources. In the absence of diversified domestic financing, predictable multi-year donor commitments or institutional funding mechanisms, CSOs remain highly exposed to external policy shifts beyond their control. Consequently, sustainability is not only a financial challenge but a structural one, shaping programme choices, organisational behaviour and the overall resilience of civic space.

While CSOs are [legally permitted](#) to engage in income-generating activities, corporate partnerships or service provision, only a small number of large NGOs have the capital, infrastructure and market access to sustain such hybrid models. Microfinance-based NGOs and organisations with established consultancy services or fee-based professional training units, offering research, evaluation or capacity-development services for institutional clients, were notably more resilient during recent funding contractions. However, this model is not representative of most rights-based or advocacy-focused CSOs, which lack comparable revenue streams.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



While the post-2024 political transition has opened limited spaces for engagement, these have not translated into predictable transparency, meaningful participation or accountability. Engagement largely depends on discretion rather than rights-based processes, which leaves civil society with few enforceable guarantees.

4.1 Transparency

Bangladesh has a formal legal framework recognising the right to information through the [Right to Information Act \(RTI\) 2009](#), which entitles citizens and CSOs to request information from public authorities. Under the act, authorities are required to respond within [20 working days](#) for ordinary requests or within 24 hours when information relates to life, liberty or urgent matters. If multiple authorities are involved, the response period may extend to 30 working days. An [appeal mechanism exists](#). If an applicant does not receive a response or is dissatisfied, a first appeal may be submitted to a designated appellate authority within the same public institution, typically a senior officer. If the outcome remains unsatisfactory, a second appeal or complaint may be filed with the Information Commission, which has the authority to investigate cases and direct disclosure. However, the act also contains broad exemption clauses [under Section 7](#), which allows information to be withheld on grounds such as national security, law enforcement, cabinet deliberations, public order or religious sensitivity. In practice, these wide exemptions, combined with weak enforcement, have significantly undermined access to information over the past year.

A critical setback has been the absence of a fully functioning Information Commission, which has effectively removed the primary enforcement and appeal mechanism under the RTI act. Since the fall of the previous government in August 2024, the Information Commission has [remained inactive](#). This has left citizens and CSOs without a standing body to hear appeals or enforce compliance with statutory time frames, and enables designated officers to disregard RTI requests without consequence. Without an operational commission,

information requests, particularly those related to budgets, procurement, regulatory decisions and policy drafting, are frequently ignored, delayed or denied without justification, with no effective avenue for redress. In practice, such delays often far exceed the statutory 20 working days and cannot be appealed.

Public institutions do not consistently publish draft laws, policy proposals or regulatory impact assessments in accessible formats or within reasonable time frames. For instance, several key legal instruments adopted in 2025, such as the [Cyber Protection Ordinance 2025](#), the [Personal Data Protection Ordinance 2025](#) and the [National Data Governance Ordinance 2025](#), were developed and approved with minimal proactive disclosure and without systematic publication of consultation outcomes.

Although some CSO actors were appointed as [advisers](#) or [commission members](#) after the political transition, this has not translated into broader institutional transparency. Access to information remains uneven, particularly for rights-based organisations and groups working outside Dhaka. At the local level, district administrations continue to exercise disproportionate control over administrative data, often requiring informal permissions or additional reporting before they release information.

Overall, transparency exists in law and in isolated practice, but is not consistently enforced or institutionalised. This justifies the assessment of partially enabling.

4.2 Participation

Evidence from 2025 illustrates these limitations in practice. In labour governance, trade unions and labour rights organisations reported that they were not meaningfully consulted on policy responses to [wage disputes and factory compliance](#). Engagement only occurred after decisions had been taken and alongside coercive measures against protest leaders. Similarly, organisations representing persons with disabilities reported near-total exclusion from decision-making processes related to social protection and administrative reform under the interim administration, despite stated commitments to inclusive governance. Consultations were either absent or limited to symbolic information-sharing.

A recent development surrounding the [National Human Rights Commission Ordinance 2025](#) further illustrates the systemic weakness of government accountability. Although the ordinance was initially [gazetted](#) in November 2025 with the expectation that it could help restore the commission's independence, a subsequent amendment in December fundamentally undermined this prospect. The unilateral inclusion of the cabinet secretary in the Selection Committee, introduced without consultation with civil society stakeholders, effectively placed the appointment process under bureaucratic control. This move has been widely criticised as bureaucratic capture. It reinforces long-standing patterns of executive dominance over oversight bodies. While the ordinance includes some positive provisions, such as setting up a National Preventive Mechanism against torture, these gains are largely neutralised by weakened enforceability and permissive language that removes mandatory obligations to report on compliance. This episode exemplifies a broader accountability failure: even where reform initiatives are announced, they are diluted through opaque decision-making, lack of justification and the absence of mechanisms for civil society to contest or monitor government actions.

After the political transition, the interim government sought to engage civil society by appointing prominent CSO leaders to advisory roles and reform commissions, including in women's affairs and media reform. However, public reporting in 2025 indicates that this

commission-based engagement [has not consistently translated](#) into meaningful influence over policy outcomes. The Women's Affairs Reform Commission submitted a major set of recommendations to the chief adviser. However, subsequent [controversy and legal challenges](#), alongside civil society criticisms, raised concerns that the commission's work was not being systematically taken forward through transparent follow-up and institutional adoption mechanisms. The Media Reform Commission provides an even clearer illustration: its chair publicly stated in December 2025 that none of the commission's [proposals](#) had been implemented, citing bureaucratic and political barriers.

As a result, participation has remained elite and individualised rather than systemic and inclusive. The appointment of a small number of civil society figures does not substitute a structured consultation processes, transparent publication of inputs, clear timelines for government response or institutionalised feedback loops that enable broader CSO influence, particularly for regional and marginalised constituencies.

4.3 Accountability

Government accountability towards civil society remains weak and inconsistent, though not entirely absent. Feedback from CSOs is occasionally requested, primarily through written submissions and, to a lesser extent, through oral inputs during consultation meetings. However, there is no functioning system to document how civil society inputs are assessed, adopted or rejected. Ministries do not publish response matrices, minutes or justifications explaining why recommendations are incorporated or disregarded. This leaves CSOs without meaningful feedback or recourse.

A clear illustration is the formulation of Bangladesh's [National Adaptation Plan](#) (NAP), which was finalised in 2023 after consultations in which more than 50 CSOs submitted written inputs across 19 thematic areas. Despite this level of engagement, the final NAP did not acknowledge civil society contributions, nor were explanations provided on the exclusion of proposed recommendations. This absence of documented follow-up exemplifies a broader pattern in which consultation does not translate into accountability. Similar dynamics have been observed in subsequent digital governance and social policy reform processes, where CSO participation occurs without transparent mechanisms for tracking influence or outcomes.

The appointment of civil society figures as advisers and commission members created isolated accountability channels, but these were not grounded in formal accountability provisions. [Appointment notifications and terms of reference](#) focused on advisory functions and report preparation, but did not establish obligations for ministries or the executive to respond to, publish or act on recommendations, nor did they require the disclosure of consultation summaries, response matrices or implementation tracking reports.

While the interim government made [public commitments](#) to inclusive and consultative governance, these assurances were not operationalised through binding procedures or administrative rules. In practice, several commissions submitted reports without receiving formal government responses or follow-up frameworks. This gap between advisory engagement and institutional follow-through underscores how accountability has remained informal, discretionary and personality-dependent, rather than embedded within governance systems.

The absence of a functioning Information Commission further undermines accountability, as CSOs lack mechanisms to challenge silence, demand explanations or monitor government

follow-through. Courts remain theoretically available, but litigation is costly, slow and inaccessible for most organisations.

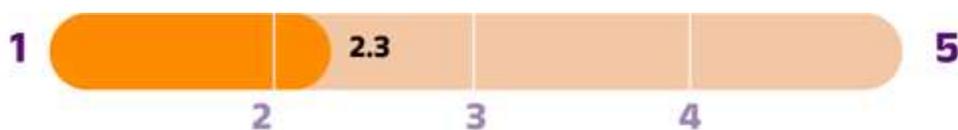
All in all, there is limited openness, weak participation and shallow accountability. While the post-transition environment has reduced overt hostility and opened narrow engagement spaces, these gains have not been institutionalised. Transparency and accountability depend on discretion rather than enforceable rights, which leaves civil society without predictable or meaningful influence over public decision-making.



PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



Public attitudes towards civil society in Bangladesh remain fragmented and uneven, shaped by political polarisation, media practices and deep-seated social hierarchies. While civil society is not uniformly delegitimised, public recognition and acceptance vary sharply depending on issue area, constituency and geographic location. The result is a civic culture that allows limited engagement for some actors, while others – particularly rights-based and marginalised-group organisations – are exposed to stigma, misrepresentation and self-censorship.

5.1 Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

Public discourse on civil society in Bangladesh has undergone a limited but visible shift since the political transition. This reflects a partial change in the government’s posture towards CSOs. The interim administration has [publicly committed](#) to inclusive governance and has appointed several prominent civil society figures to advisory roles and reform commissions, including in areas such as women’s affairs, media reform, anti-corruption and governance diagnostics. These steps have coincided with the [re-emergence of critical civic voices](#) in public debate, particularly in urban centres such as Dhaka, and a renewed, though uneven, presence of CSOs in national media discussions.

However, this opening has not translated into a consistently supportive discursive environment. Public and political messaging towards civil society remains inconsistent. Organisations that challenge dominant social or religious narratives, particularly on [women’s rights and equality](#), are frequently portrayed in public discourse as advancing “Western” or externally imposed agendas, a framing that has been used to delegitimise reform initiatives and the civil society actors associated with them. This was evident in 2025, when proposed women’s rights reforms triggered [large-scale protests](#) in which advocacy initiatives were

publicly framed as alien to national and religious values, with demonstrators demanding the dissolution of reform bodies and accountability for commission members.

Rights-based organisations, particularly those working on gender equality, continue to face hostile framing in public discourse. This rhetoric [has reinforced suspicion](#) of rights-based civil society actors and heightened social hostility around their work. Media narratives are polarised: independent outlets continue to report on civil society initiatives in a largely factual manner, while partisan and ideologically aligned platforms have amplified narratives portraying rights-based advocacy as socially disruptive or externally driven.

The discursive environment also exhibits a pronounced centre–periphery divide. CSOs operating outside Dhaka, especially those representing minority or marginalised communities, receive limited media attention and have fewer opportunities to participate in national debates. As a result, public discourse disproportionately reflects the perspectives of urban, service delivery-oriented NGOs, while alternative voices and lived experiences remain marginalised.

Qualitative [research](#) conducted in 2025 on youth-led civil society initiatives further illustrates the fragility of public discourse around civic action. Fieldwork across multiple regions found that many youth-led groups, particularly outside Dhaka, operate without formal recognition, rely on volunteer labour and crowdfunding, and face social suspicion rather than public validation. Organisers reported avoiding visibility, limiting public communication or using anonymised digital tools due to fears of harassment, surveillance or backlash linked to their advocacy work, especially on gender, Indigenous identity and minority rights. Despite filling critical service and governance gaps at the community level, these initiatives remain largely absent from mainstream public narratives. This reinforces a discursive environment in which civic contribution does not translate into legitimacy or protection.

Taken together, these dynamics indicate that while public dialogue on civil society has reopened to some extent, it remains unequal, selective and vulnerable to politicised framing.

5.2 Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

Public perception of civil society and civic engagement in Bangladesh remains highly politicised and unstable. Trust in CSOs fluctuates depending on political context, with organisations often viewed through partisan lenses rather than as independent public-interest actors. Broader public confidence in engaging with governance processes remains limited. For example, a [2025 Citizen Perception Survey](#) found that only about one quarter of citizens feel politically empowered. This indicates low expectations that civic engagement can meaningfully influence public decision-making.

Civic education remains largely absent from formal curricula and sustained community programming. There is limited public education on civic rights, responsibilities or the role of civil society in democratic governance. This contributes to shallow public understanding of CSOs and restricts civic participation to episodic mobilisation rather than continuous engagement.

Media coverage further reinforces these uneven perceptions. While women’s rights and high-profile political issues occasionally receive attention, other areas, such as child rights, remain persistently underreported. Child-focused advocacy organisations and coalitions report difficulty securing sustained media coverage even on urgent protection concerns. This contributes to skewed public awareness of civil society’s scope and role.

5.3 Civic Equality and Inclusion

Civic equality and inclusion in Bangladesh are formally recognised in law but unevenly realised in practice. [Articles 27 to 29 of the Constitution](#) guarantee equality before the law and non-discrimination. Sector-specific legislation provides protection for women, persons with disabilities and religious minorities, including the [Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013](#). These frameworks allow CSOs representing marginalised groups to exist and operate, and in some cases to engage with state institutions, particularly through service delivery and humanitarian action.

However, structural and social barriers continue to limit equal participation. Gender norms, patriarchal practices and gender-based [violence constrain women's civic engagement](#), particularly outside urban centres. Political mobilisation around women's rights has at times triggered social backlash that discourages participation. Indigenous communities face persistent exclusion due to the absence of constitutional recognition of Indigenous identity and limited legal protection of land, language and cultural rights. This affects representation and civic organising. Persons with disabilities encounter accessibility barriers and weak enforcement of inclusion mandates, while LGBTQIA+ communities remain legally unprotected and socially stigmatised, forcing many organisations and individuals to operate informally or with limited visibility.

These inequalities are reinforced at the community and administrative levels through informal gatekeeping, discretionary decision-making and social exclusion. During humanitarian responses, for example, after the [2024 floods in Feni](#), it was observed through the assessment process and practitioner inputs that reliance on religious spaces as shelters discouraged participation by gender-diverse persons and sex workers. This illustrates how exclusion can persist even in crisis contexts. Refugee-led and refugee-focused civil society, particularly among Rohingya communities, also [remains tightly restricted](#), with limited scope for independent civic organisation beyond service provision.

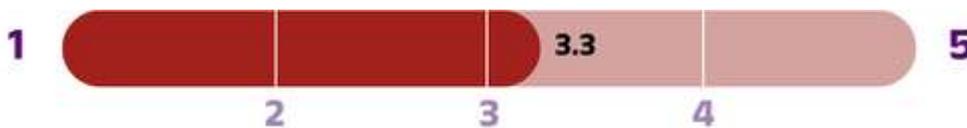
However, the environment is not uniformly closed. Civil society actors representing marginalised groups continue to advocate, organise and deliver services. Some government and non-state initiatives have sought to promote inclusion, particularly in disability rights and social protection. Yet these efforts remain fragmented and are not enough to overcome entrenched inequalities.

Overall, civic participation in Bangladesh is formally open but substantively unequal. Legal access exists and some engagement is possible, but persistent social norms, weak implementation and structural exclusions prevent equitable participation across groups.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



Bangladesh’s digital civic space has undergone positive changes over the past year, compared to the overtly repressive practices of the previous regime. However, this improvement remains fragile and reversible. It is shaped by unresolved legal risks, persistent surveillance infrastructure, and deep inequalities in access and capacity. While extreme forms of digital repression have declined, structural vulnerabilities continue to constrain civil society’s ability to operate safely and equitably online.

6.1 Digital Rights and Freedoms

Digital rights and freedoms in Bangladesh have improved modestly but remain legally and institutionally fragile. The most significant positive development during the assessment period is the absence of internet shutdowns, bandwidth throttling or nationwide platform blocks. Such measures were frequently used under the previous government to suppress dissent. For example, during mass protests in [July 2024](#), authorities imposed a nationwide internet shutdown that severely disrupted communications, civic mobilisation and economic activity. No comparable shutdowns were recorded during 2025. Independent assessments corroborate this shift. [Freedom on the Net 2025](#) recorded Bangladesh’s largest year-on-year global improvement in internet freedom, citing regulatory changes under the interim government that curtailed internet shutdowns and reflected official commitments to treat internet access as a human rights concern.

The adoption of the [Cyber Protection Ordinance 2025](#) marked a departure from the most punitive provisions of earlier digital speech laws, notably the [Digital Security Act 2018](#), which it formally repealed. As an ordinance issued under Article 93 of the Constitution, it currently has the force of law but remains provisional pending parliamentary ratification. Arrests for online “anti-state” speech have declined, and fear of immediate detention has eased among journalists and activists.

However, these gains are constrained by the continued presence of overbroad legal powers. **Section 8** of the Cyber Protection Ordinance authorises content blocking on grounds of national security, public order or religious harmony. These terms are undefined and open to discretionary interpretation. In parallel, the Personal Data Protection Ordinance 2025 and the National Data Governance Ordinance 2025 grant extensive executive authority over data access and retention without independent oversight or robust judicial safeguards. Civil society organisations have [warned](#) that these frameworks risk reintroducing censorship through regulatory rather than punitive mechanisms.

Notably, the [Cyber Protection Ordinance](#) explicitly recognises citizens' right to continuous access to the internet within its statutory definition of cyber security. This marks the first time internet access has been framed as a legal right in Bangladesh. However, enforcement remains weak and uneven, and the exercise of this right remains subject to broad exception clauses. Taken together, the environment reflects reduced repression but there are still unresolved legal risks.

6.2 Digital Security and Privacy

The digital security environment for civil society has improved in practice since the political transition following the removal of the previous government in 2024. However, it remains structurally insecure. Panel evidence and civil society monitoring indicate a sharp decline in state-sponsored cyberattacks, coordinated bot harassment and direct digital intimidation targeting CSOs during the assessment period. Online disinformation campaigns now largely reflect political party rivalries rather than coordinated government action.

Importantly, no major state or non-state cyberattacks against CSOs were reported in the past year. This represents a significant shift from earlier periods when hacking, account takeovers and digital surveillance were commonly reported by rights-based organisations. Despite these improvements, elements of the surveillance architecture built over the past 16 years continue to operate in practice, even as key institutional arrangements have been formally restructured. The [Data Protection Ordinance](#) grants authorities broad access to personal data, without meaningful consent requirements, independent oversight bodies or accessible redress mechanisms. CSOs continue to report evidence gathering, monitoring and informal information requests by security agencies, which create a persistent sense of digital vulnerability even in the absence of overt attacks.

In 2025, Bangladesh adopted a significant legal reform with the passage of the [Bangladesh Telecommunication \(Amendment\) Ordinance 2025](#), introducing structural safeguards that directly affect digital rights, freedom of expression and privacy. Most notably, the ordinance permanently prohibits internet and telecommunication shutdowns under any circumstances through the insertion of Section 97. This marks a decisive break from past practices where nationwide and localised shutdowns were used to suppress dissent and restrict access to information. The reform also abolishes the National Telecommunications Monitoring Centre (NTMC), a [long-criticised](#) surveillance body. It is replaced by a new oversight-based framework in which lawful interception requires approval from a quasi-judicial council, alongside mandatory parliamentary reporting, without fully dismantling existing interception capacities or data-access practices set up under earlier laws. The ordinance further narrows speech-related offences by limiting criminal liability to direct incitement to violence, strengthens protections against misuse of SIM and device registration data, and restores a degree of institutional autonomy to the [Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission \(BTRC\)](#).

While these reforms substantially improve the legal environment for digital freedoms and privacy, concerns remain about the effectiveness of oversight mechanisms in practice and the continued operation of legacy surveillance infrastructure under other laws. Nevertheless, the ordinance represents a rare and consequential rights-affirming intervention in Bangladesh's digital governance framework. It contributes to a measurably more enabling environment for online expression and privacy than in previous years.

Thus, while immediate threats have diminished, structural risks remain embedded in law and infrastructure. This supports a partially enabling assessment.

6.3 Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility in Bangladesh remains significantly unequal, which undermines the ability of large segments of the population, and many CSOs, to participate effectively in digital civic space. Although internet infrastructure is widely deployed, access is neither universal nor equitable. According to [DataReportal's Digital 2026: Bangladesh report](#), there were 82.8 million internet users at the end of 2025, corresponding to an internet penetration rate of 47.0 per cent. This means that over half of the population, about 93 million people, remained offline. These figures stand in sharp contrast to official connectivity statistics based on mobile subscriptions and illustrate that headline access indicators substantially overstate meaningful digital inclusion.

Affordability and quality remain persistent barriers. While Bangladesh recorded 186 million mobile connections, which is equivalent to 105 per cent of the population, DataReportal and GSMA Intelligence [caution](#) that many subscriptions include only voice or SMS services and do not provide reliable internet access. High device costs, expensive mobile data packages and inconsistent network quality disproportionately affect rural users, women and low-income communities. This reinforces gaps in regular and effective internet use.

These barriers intersect with digital literacy deficits, particularly among CSOs operating outside major cities, many of which lack the information and communication technology (ICT) capacity to engage with online funding systems, digital advocacy tools or emerging AI-driven platforms. High device costs, expensive data packages and unreliable connectivity disproportionately affect rural users and low-income communities. These barriers intersect with digital literacy gaps, particularly among CSOs operating outside major cities, many of which lack the ICT capacity to engage with online funding systems, digital advocacy tools or emerging AI-driven platforms.

The exclusion is most acute for persons with disabilities, especially those with visual impairments. Despite the legal recognition of internet access as a right, government portals, public service platforms and essential digital interfaces remain largely inaccessible. Screen-reader compatibility is inconsistent, alt-text is often missing and inclusive design standards are rarely applied. As a result, formal access exists without functional usability.

All in all, though Bangladesh's digital civic space is less overtly repressive than in previous years, it is far from secure or inclusive. Legal ambiguity, persistent surveillance capacity and deep accessibility gaps continue to limit civil society's digital freedom. Improvements in practice are real but fragile, and unevenly distributed across communities and regions.

C) Recommendations

1. To the Government of Bangladesh

Strengthen legal guarantees for freedom of association

- Ensure effective implementation and legal certainty following the amendment to Section 14 of the FDRA, which removes provisions allowing punitive action based on vague or subjective assessments of speech. This positive reform should be consolidated through clear administrative guidance to prevent discretionary enforcement and ensure consistent application across authorities. Publicly clarify the scope and intent of the amended provision, including through official circulars or guidelines, to reassure civil society actors that peaceful expression and advocacy will not trigger regulatory sanctions.
- Clarify and reform the legal framework governing peaceful assembly by replacing discretionary or permission-based practices with a clear notification-based system, and issue publicly available guidelines to ensure consistent application by local authorities.
- Strengthen protection for freedom of expression by issuing operational guidance to law enforcement on preventing, investigating and responding to threats or violence against journalists, media outlets, and cultural or religious groups, including during periods of heightened political tension.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of criminal laws that affect expression, including security, public order and cyber-related legislation, to identify and amend provisions that disproportionately restrict freedom of expression, ensuring alignment with constitutional guarantees and Bangladesh's international obligations.

Institutionalise transparency and participation

- Reactivate and operationalise the **Information Commission** as a matter of urgency, ensuring it has the authority, resources and independence to enforce the Right to Information Act 2009.
- Introduce mandatory public disclosure requirements for draft laws, policies, budgets and regulatory ordinances, with minimum consultation periods and public documentation of how feedback is assessed and used.

End tokenistic consultation practices

- Set up clear, early-stage consultation mechanisms with CSOs in policy formulation processes, particularly on digital regulation, governance reforms and social protection policies.
- Publish formal responses explaining why civil society inputs are accepted or rejected in major policy decisions.

Protect digital rights and privacy

- Revise the Cyber Protection Ordinance 2025, the Personal Data Protection Ordinance 2025 and the National Data Governance Ordinance 2025, to introduce independent oversight, clear safeguards against misuse and accessible redress mechanisms.
- Operationalise and strengthen lawful-interception oversight under the Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amendment) Ordinance 2025, by (i) publishing the council's rules of procedure, criteria and reporting requirements, and (ii) reforming the oversight body's composition and powers to ensure genuine independence (e.g., inclusion of judicial representation and protection from executive conflicts of interest), alongside regular public transparency reporting on interception requests.
- Dismantle or subject mass-surveillance systems to strict legal limits, transparency requirements and independent review, including safeguards to prevent migration of legacy surveillance capacity into new entities or informal practices.

Promote inclusive civic participation

- Adopt affirmative measures to ensure the participation of marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, religious minorities and LGBTQIA+ communities, in public consultations and decision-making processes. This can be achieved by holding consultations outside Dhaka and reducing geographic, linguistic and logistical barriers to participation.
- Ensure all government digital platforms comply with universal accessibility standards, particularly for visually impaired users, including screen-reader compatibility, alt-text and accessible document formats.

2. To Civil Society Actors

Strengthen collective action and coalition-building

- Rebuild broad-based coalitions across thematic areas to counter fragmentation, reduce self-censorship and amplify collective advocacy, particularly on issues of accountability, digital rights and inclusion.
- Ensure marginalised and regional CSOs are meaningfully represented in national platforms and alliances.

Enhance documentation and evidence-based advocacy

- Systematically document delays, denials and procedural barriers in registration, funding approvals and consultations to strengthen legal challenges and international advocacy.
- Invest in monitoring and reporting mechanisms that track government follow-through on commitments and reforms.

Invest in digital resilience and inclusion

- Strengthen internal digital security protocols and privacy practices, especially for organisations working on sensitive issues.
- Build digital and ICT capacities of regional and grassroots CSOs, including training on online tools, accessibility standards and responsible use of emerging technologies such as AI.

Engage strategically with reform opportunities

- Engage proactively but critically with reform initiatives and advisory platforms, maintaining independence while pushing for institutional rather than individual accountability gains.

3. To Donors and the International Community

Support long-term, flexible funding

- Increase multi-year and core funding to reduce dependency on short-term project cycles and enable strategic planning, staff retention and institutional resilience.
- Simplify reporting requirements for smaller and grassroots CSOs, and provide tailored support to help them meet compliance standards.

Prioritise inclusion and regional equity

- Direct targeted funding to CSOs operating outside Dhaka and those working with marginalised communities, including disability-led and LGBTQIA+ organisations.
- Support digital accessibility initiatives, including funding for accessible platforms, assistive technologies and inclusive design.

Use diplomatic leverage for structural reform

- Continue coordinated engagement with the Government of Bangladesh to support concrete, rights-consistent reforms affecting civic space, digital rights and data protection, with an emphasis on legal clarity, predictability and institutional safeguards.
- Frame engagement on the FDRA around development impact rather than conditionality. This can be achieved by clearly communicating how regulatory uncertainty, delays and discretionary controls affect the ability of international partners to fund social services, humanitarian assistance, rights protection and community-level initiatives aligned with national priorities. Link trade preferences, development cooperation and governance support to measurable improvements in transparency, participation and accountability, using mutually agreed benchmarks and public reporting rather than ad hoc political pressure.

Support independent monitoring and protection

- Fund independent civic space monitoring, legal aid and rapid response mechanisms to protect CSOs and activists facing administrative, legal or digital threats.
 - Support platforms that amplify local civil society voices in regional and global forums.
-

D) Research Process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions that 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 to 6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries that are 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 October 2025. 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, which reflects 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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