



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

India

June 2026

Context

Period covered by the report: April 2026 – June 2026

The enabling environment for civil society in India during the April to June 2026 quarter was shaped by a convergence of electoral transitions as well as intensifying regulatory pressure on foreign-funded organisations through the notification of the [Foreign Contribution \(Regulation\) Amendments Rules, 2026](#) (FCRA). The cumulative effect was a further narrowing of operational and civic space, even as judicial developments and state-level partnerships offered limited but meaningful counterweights.

The quarter was dominated politically by the results of the five state assembly elections — in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Puducherry — held on 9 April 2026, with results declared on 4 May. [The Kerala elections produced a historic result](#), with the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) securing 102 seats, ending a decade of Left Democratic Front rule and marking the most significant UDF mandate since 1977. [These election outcomes have direct negative implications for civil society](#), where the FCRA Amendment Bill's potential impact on minority-run institutions — schools, hospitals, and charitable organisations — was a live electoral issue. In Assam, the ruling administration, re-elected for a third consecutive term, has [characterised civil society scrutiny of its large scale land clearing eviction and border operations as 'propaganda'](#), raising concerns about shrinking space for independent civil society monitoring in the state, leading to heightened scrutiny of CSOs in border and conflict-sensitive regions. In Tamil Nadu, the Tamilaga Vetti Kazhagam (TVK) [won 108 of 234 assembly seats](#) — the highest tally of any party — and formed a coalition government, with C. Joseph Vijay sworn in as Chief Minister on 10 May 2026, ending over five decades of Dravidian party dominance in the state. This transition's impact on civil society remains untested, though the new government's stated commitments to social justice and transparent administration will be closely monitored in future.

On 1 April 2026, the Union Home Ministry officially [rolled out](#) the 16th Census of India — the first fully digital census in the country's history, [approved](#) by the Union Cabinet in December 2025. Notably, it includes nationwide caste enumeration for the first time since 1931. The census presents both an opportunity for evidence-based civil society advocacy and concerns around digital data collection and privacy for marginalised communities.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Civic freedoms remain exercised but fragile, with resilience continually tested. Civil society operates actively through advocacy, assembly, and judicial engagement, yet the environment is strained. Civil society activists and human rights defenders often [face harassment](#), detentions, criminalisation, and other forms of intimidation, including torture. Judicial interventions provide important safeguards, affirming due process and accountability, while the constitutional and legal framework continues to protect freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. However, the enjoyment of these freedoms is uneven in practice.

In Assam, the introduction of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill on 25 May 2026 sharply divided civil society, with progressive and women's rights groups welcoming its ban on polygamy and child marriage, while minority organisations and [human rights activists](#) strongly condemned provisions mandating registration of live-in relationships as state surveillance and moral policing, with several minority collectives preparing constitutional challenges and critics pointing to the total exemption of Scheduled Tribes as undermining the bill's own premise of uniformity. Civil society actors warn that mandatory registration could enable surveillance and harassment, creating a chilling effect on advocacy and associational freedoms.

Conflict, social tensions, and security-related concerns further shape the environment in which civil society functions, affecting enjoyment of fundamental freedoms. In both Meghalaya and Manipur, civil society actors perceive law enforcement and investigative action as being directed against community leaders rather than as neutral processes, deepening the mistrust between CSOs and state institutions. This narrows the space for free and fearless civic participation, particularly in regions already marked by communal or ethnic fault lines, where advocacy and peacebuilding depend on organisations being able to operate without fear of targeted legal action. [On 14 April 2026, eleven civil society organisations from Dadenggre in West Garo Hills, Meghalaya, submitted a joint complaint](#) alleging harassment and intimidation of community leaders by law enforcement authorities following communal clashes in the region, citing procedural irregularities and insufficient evidence in the cases filed against them. On 1 May 2026, [tensions escalated in Tengnoupal district, Manipur, after the National Investigation Agency arrested a key accused](#) in the 2023 killing of a Sub Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) in Moreh, prompting several Kuki civil society groups to call a shutdown and condemn the action as selective targeting of Kuki-Zo community leaders. The response in both cases — a formal joint complaint in one and collective mobilisation in the other — shows that civil society continues to contest these pressures through legitimate channels rather than withdrawing, indicating that the space, though strained, remains active.

Judicial and institutional mechanisms remain available to address grievances, but their effectiveness is often challenged by broader pressures. On 21 April 2026, several Chakma civil society organisations — including student, women's, teachers' and employees' associations under the Chakma Autonomous District Council — [submitted a joint memorandum to the Governor of Mizoram seeking intervention in a boundary-related dispute](#). The community's ability to collectively access formal institutional channels without obstruction indicates that avenues for minority grievance redress remain open, though the underlying dispute reflects continuing concerns over the protection of autonomous council boundaries and minority representation in Mizoram. [The Delhi High Court, on 20 May 2026, declined to order a Central Bureau of Investigation \(CBI\) probe into the alleged detention](#) and torture of 10 activists in March 2026, instead allowing the Delhi Police's internal inquiry led by a Joint Commissioner to proceed. The bench of Justices Navin Chawla and Ravinder Dubeja warned, however, that if the internal inquiry turned out to be an "eyewash", the court would not hesitate to escalate the matter — implying a transfer of the investigation to an independent agency and accountability for the officers involved. The activists had alleged unlawful detention and torture, prompting habeas corpus petitions. The court emphasised that even in cases involving grave allegations, due procedure must be followed and torture cannot be used as a means of interrogation. This has a mixed impact: the allegations themselves reflect a negative environment where civic freedoms are at risk, while the judiciary's intervention and insistence on accountability represent a positive safeguard.

2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework

India's regulatory environment for civil society is in transition. Reforms under the Income Tax Act, such as consolidated Registered Non-Profit Organisation (RNPO) registration, longer validity periods, and digital assessments have simplified compliance and improved predictability. Judicial rulings have also curbed overreach, reinforcing legal certainty for Charitable Trusts. Yet scrutiny of foreign-funded organisations, limits on commercial receipts, and donor deduction cycles continue to create vulnerabilities. State-mandated changes to trust governance and expanding tax authority add further uncertainty. The latest FCRA amendments, with purpose-based registration and spending thresholds, narrow operational space and heighten risks for smaller and rights-based organisations. Overall, it shows progress in streamlining procedures but remains restrictive in practice, with tightening rules constraining autonomy, sustainability, and access to resources.

On 1 April 2026, the Income Tax Act, 2025 came into force, [replacing the six-decade-old Income Tax Act, 1961 and reclassifying all NGOs, charitable trusts, and societies as](#)

[Registered Non-Profit Organisations \(RNPOs\)](#) under a single consolidated chapter — with all existing registrations transitioning automatically, starting with the assessment year of 2026-2027. That means existing organisations retain their tax benefits without needing to reapply, sparing organisations a fresh application process. While the reform brings meaningful simplification — including extended 10-year registration validity for smaller organisations, faceless digital assessments, and reduced compliance ambiguity — cautionary elements remain, including front-loaded foreign object risk scrutiny at the registration stage, a separate five-year renewal cycle for donor deduction eligibility, and a 20% cap on commercial receipts that may constrain income-generating CSOs. While the RNPO framework represents a net improvement in the legal environment for civil society, its full impact on the enabling environment will depend on how the foreign object risk scrutiny provisions are implemented in practice — with smaller and internationally-funded CSOs remaining most vulnerable to inadvertent compliance lapses during the transition period.

Expanding tax-authority scrutiny over "commercial activity" is creating uncertainty around the tax-exempt status of long-established non-profits, with tax authorities having denied or questioned renewals for several well-known Mumbai charitable organisations throughout March 2026. In response, [Reliance Trust, ISKCON, Hinduja Hospital, and Breach Candy Hospital approached the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal \(ITAT\)](#) challenging the Income Tax Department's move to cancel or deny renewal of their Section 12AB registration, on grounds that they were engaged in "commercial activities."

In individual cases, judicial intervention has been successful in checking overreach by tax authorities, reinforcing predictability and legal certainty for charitable trusts navigating an already tightening compliance landscape. [The Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, Mumbai Bench, as per the report published on 19 June 2026, directed the Commissioner of Income Tax \(Exemptions\)](#) to delete conditions imposed while granting renewal of registration under Sections 12AB and 80G to several charitable trusts. The dispute arose after the tax department had rejected or conditionally renewed registrations where trust deeds lacked an explicit "irrevocable trust" clause. ITAT held that such contingent conditions, not contemplated under the statute, were adversely affecting trusts' day-to-day functioning, donor confidence, and statutory compliance, and were unnecessary since adequate safeguards for future violations already exist under the Act.

The regulatory environment further saw the impacts of a tightened legal framework governing trust governance. Following the Maharashtra Public Trusts (Amendment) Ordinance of 2025, which caps lifetime trustees at one-fourth of a trust's strength and sets a default five-year term, Tata Trusts reported in April 2026 that it [will not reappoint](#) its existing lifetime trustees once their current terms end. The rule affects major Tata-linked trusts like Ratan Tata Trust, where lifetime trustees currently exceed this new limit. While framed as improving accountability, such state-imposed restructuring of leadership structures sets a precedent that could be extended to constrain governance autonomy across the broader non-profit sector.

The most significant change in the regulatory framework occurred on 22 June 2026 when the Ministry of Home Affairs [notified the Foreign Contribution \(Regulation\) Amendment Rules, 2026](#), introducing twelve significant changes to the FCRA Rules, 2011 — including purpose-based and geography-specific registration, a minimum utilisation threshold of ₹10 lakh for renewal, mandatory social media disclosure, and a 75% utilisation condition before instalment releases. The amendment continues a decade-long trajectory of regulatory tightening, building on [the Supreme Court's 2022 ruling that upheld the 2020 FCRA amendments](#), affirming that the right to association does not extend to an unconditional right to receive foreign funds — a judicial position that has since provided constitutional cover for successive rounds of regulatory restriction. With FCRA [registrations having fallen drastically](#), the 2026 Rules amendment arrives in deeply contested terrain, with its cumulative effect likely to further narrow the operational and financial space for India's foreign-funded civil society organisations, particularly those engaged in rights-based advocacy, humanitarian work, and cross-border programming. The Kerala Members of Parliament [formally demanded](#) the withdrawal of the FCRA Amendment Rules, 2026. Civil society, church bodies, and political leaders in Meghalaya have also [voiced strong concerns](#) that the FCRA Amendment Bill, now in effect, undermines the autonomy and sustainability of charitable and faith-based

organisations. Through consultations and memoranda to the Centre, they highlight risks to civic space and associational freedoms, alongside broader regional issues such as immigration and language inclusion.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Civil society's resource environment in India reflects both growing restrictions and emerging opportunities. Successive foreign funding regulations under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act have narrowed access to external contributions, raising sustainability concerns for schools, hospitals, and smaller organisations that depend heavily on such support. At the same time, structural gaps persist in domestic funding. Yet new mechanisms — such as CSR channels through state trusts and indigenous knowledge initiatives signal diversification of funding sources and can add to the pool of non-financial resources available to civil society. Overall, the resource landscape is mixed: restrictive foreign funding rules continue to undermine sustainability, but innovative domestic mechanisms, CSR reforms, and community-driven initiatives offer pathways to resilience and diversification.

The FCRA Amendment Rules, 2026 have significantly increased the difficulty for civil society organisations to access foreign funding. New requirements narrow the pipeline of resources by tying funds to pre-specified activities and locations, while renewal is contingent on meeting spending thresholds. This creates a direct impact on the sustainability of service delivery, particularly for smaller organisations that depend heavily on external resources to serve vulnerable communities.

Advocacy efforts by CSOs, backed by parliamentary voices, highlight increasing mobilisation against regulatory overreach and its impact on service delivery. [On 7 April 2026, civil society organisations from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana called for revisions to the FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026](#), raising serious concerns about the proposed creation of a designated authority empowered to assume provisional and permanent control over foreign contributions and assets — even those only partly created through foreign funding. The collective advocacy effort reflects growing regional civil society mobilisation against regulatory overreach, simultaneously signalling concerns to government and building broader public awareness of the operational realities facing CSOs on the ground. On 26 June 2026, [Kerala MPs formally opposed the FCRA Amendment Rules, 2026, warning that the new regulations could force the closure of schools, hospitals, and charitable institutions](#) that have served communities for decades on foreign funding. With concerns growing that the cumulative impact of successive FCRA amendments is putting the assets and operations of CSOs at risk, civil society organisations have stepped up their advocacy — and are now finding political allies willing to take their concerns directly to the Centre. This growing convergence of civil society voices and parliamentary support marks a significant moment in the pushback against increasingly restrictive foreign funding regulations.

Disability-focused organisations, despite their significant presence, remain critically underfunded, revealing inequities in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) allocation and government prioritisation. On 13 May 2026, [Bengaluru-based law firm and think tank Pacta, together with disability inclusion enabler Able Foundation](#), released a report finding that despite nearly 10% of India's registered nonprofits working in the disability sector, they receive only about 1% of Corporate Social Responsibility funding, with combined Union and State allocations for disability remaining critically low at approximately 0.04% of GDP. The report highlights a "low-funding equilibrium" driven by weak government prioritisation, limited philanthropic investment, and the higher per-beneficiary cost of disability interventions — creating a structural funding crisis for organisations delivering rehabilitation, inclusive education, and livelihood support to persons with disabilities.

At the same time, recent developments have opened new, regulated channels for non-profits to access corporate CSR funding— diversifying funding sources at a time when foreign funding routes are facing increasing restriction. [On 20 May 2026, the Mizoram government](#)

[decided to expand the Chief Minister's Charitable Trust as a platform for channeling CSR funding to government departments](#), NGOs, and community groups, while pursuing FCRA registration to strengthen access to domestic and foreign resources for welfare and development initiatives. This initiative could improve access to financial resources for NGOs and community organisations by creating a more structured mechanism. Similarly, [the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has expanded Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013 on 29 May 2026, by introducing a new item permitting "subscription to zero coupon zero principal instruments on the Social Stock Exchange"](#) as a recognised CSR activity, in line with the government's "Viksit Bharat" vision. Zero Coupon Zero Principal (ZCZP) instruments are a Social Stock Exchange mechanism that allows non-profit organisations to raise funds from investors/donors without any repayment obligation, functioning effectively as a structured donation instrument and expanding CSOs' access to funding.

State budgets in areas like renewable energy also open collaborative opportunities for CSOs to expand their activities. [On 19 June, 2026, the Kerala State Government's revised budget placed emphasis on the aggressive promotion of renewable energy sources for meeting Kerala's future energy needs](#). The Budget has earmarked ₹100 crore for renewable energy, green hydrogen, and alternative energy sources. Under these initiatives, efforts will be made to deploy floating solar panel systems, pumped storage projects (PSP) as well as large-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and, in the panchayats, community-based BESS. The CSOs working in the field of environment and renewable energy can expand their activities through this project in collaboration with Kerala State Government.

Beyond funding, civil society is drawing on indigenous knowledge — adding to the pool of non-financial resources. On International Biodiversity Day, 22 May 2026, [Guwahati based nonprofit APRINS launched the Vasudha initiative to highlight indigenous agricultural heritage across Northeast India](#). By showcasing traditional farming products from remote communities, the initiative demonstrates how civil society can preserve and share indigenous ecological knowledge as a vital resource. It links biodiversity conservation with rural livelihoods, while strengthening cultural identity and sustainability. As such, Vasudha offers a replicable model for how civil society organisations can draw on indigenous knowledge to protect ecosystems and empower communities.

4. Open and responsive state

The environment reflects a dual trajectory of expanding collaboration and narrowing transparency. On one hand, Governments across states are increasingly engaging CSOs in areas such as tourism, health, women's safety, poverty elimination, environmental restoration, and youth entrepreneurship. These partnerships demonstrate openness to dialogue, structured cooperation, and recognition of civil society's capacity to deliver services and mobilise communities. On the other hand, accountability mechanisms face strain. Decisions weakening the Right to Information framework and excluding influential institutions from public scrutiny reduce transparency and limit civic oversight. Concerns over privacy provisions and discretionary interpretations of information access point to a shrinking space for citizens and CSOs to hold power to account. Constructive collaboration is expanding across multiple sectors, but transparency and accountability safeguards remain contested, leaving civil society to balance new opportunities for partnership with persistent challenges in ensuring openness and responsiveness.

The reporting period has seen an expansion of constructive state-civil society collaboration across sectors, offering a positive counterpoint to the broader national trend of regulatory tightening and institutional suspicion toward CSOs. For example, recent months have seen a spread of state-CSO collaborations, concentrated in South and Northeast India: sustainable, community-based [tourism management in Mizoram](#) with the Young Mizo Association; [healthcare delivery in Karnataka](#) alongside Smile Train India; women's safety and gender rights through [Tamil Nadu's new Singappenn Special Force](#) and [Kerala's revised women's safety policy](#), both shaped with CSO inputs; women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in Andhra Pradesh, via [coordination committees under MEPMA](#) and an [MoU with the Bharatiya](#)

[Yuva Shakti Trust](#); and [early childhood development in Meghalaya](#), supported by the Van Leer Foundation and the Asian Development Bank.

The same openness extends to environmental restoration and consultative policymaking — including a notable shift from confrontation to partnership. Over the past two years, NGOs, citizen groups, ecologists and engineers have worked to restore, expand, and even build lakes from scratch. But in response they had to face notices from BBMP (Brihat Bengaluru Mahanagar Palika), First Information Reports, and court cases. [On 20 May, 2026, this long-standing controversy seems to come to an end with the latest initiative and collaboration between CSOs and CRPF lake authorities.](#) The CSOs state that they have received institutional and government support, along with CSR funding, to carry out these projects. This shows a shift in state posture — civil society groups once prosecuted are now collaborating with institutions. On 2 June 2026, [Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma held consultations with civil society organisations, religious institutions, workers' unions, educational bodies, industry representatives, and youth groups](#) on issues including employment, labour welfare, industrial growth, and community development. The consultations reinforced dialogue-based governance by providing stakeholders with a platform to engage directly with the government and contribute to policymaking. On the same day, [the Tamil Nadu Government formally partnered with CSOs](#) to take up long-pending lake restoration work, including clearing invasive vegetation, removing silt, and cleaning water bodies ahead of the monsoon season. By entrusting civil society organisations with this responsibility, the government has not only acknowledged their capacity for meaningful ground-level work but also created a structured space for CSOs to contribute to public infrastructure and environmental restoration — strengthening the model of collaborative governance between the state and civil society. On 6 June 2026, [Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy, while inaugurating a government-led tree plantation drive in Telangana, publicly called upon CSOs, educational institutions, and environmentalists to join the initiative as active partners.](#) The Minister's open invitation — framed as a mass movement from the Prime Minister to the last village resident — signals a welcoming stance from the Central Government toward civil society participation in national environmental programmes, opening meaningful avenues for organisations to engage and collaborate at the highest level of governance.

Where CSOs press their case, judicial and administrative institutions have responded. [The Supreme Court has ruled on 27 May 2026, that trauma care is an integral part of the right to life](#) under Article 21, on a plea filed by the Savelife Foundation seeking trauma care recognition as a public law right. The bench directed all states and UTs to integrate emergency/ambulance helplines into Helpline 112 within three months, establish good Samaritan grievance redressal systems, ensure ambulance GPS tracking, and operationalise the cashless PM RAHAT scheme for road accident victims. This reflects the judiciary acting as a positive enabler — responding directly to civil society (Savelife Foundation) advocacy by translating a policy gap into binding, enforceable state obligations. Similarly, on 19 June 2026, [the Tamil Nadu Government halted a ₹2,000 crore housing project by Brigade Enterprises in Perumbakkam, Chennai, following a complaint by NGO Arappor Iyakkam, which flagged that construction had begun without mandatory clearance from the Tamil Nadu State Wetland Authority.](#) The project — a 1,250-unit development across 14.7 acres — falls within an ecologically sensitive zone near the Pallikaranai Ramsar Wetland Site, a critical natural flood buffer for Chennai. The government's decisive response signals a positive shift for CSOs working on environmental protection, showing that civil society advocacy can prevail even against large and powerful interests when backed by regulatory accountability.

Against this, some decisions weakening the RTI framework and shielding institutions from scrutiny reduce transparency and limit civic oversight. Civil society organizations' criticism of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act's infringement on the right to access to information under the guise of privacy protection has resulted in [five separate public interest challenges](#) to the Act awaiting decision. Petitioners are challenging Section 44(3) since the provision allows government-held information to be withheld simply by labelling it "personal," with no requirement to balance privacy against transparency or accountability. Further, [the Central Information Commission's decision, announced on 18 May 2026, to exclude the Board of](#)

[Control for Cricket in India \(BCCI\)](#) from the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act weakens the expectation that powerful institutions exercising significant public influence should be answerable to citizens through transparent and accessible mechanisms. By holding that the BCCI is not a "public authority" under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act, the ruling reduces the avenues through which the public can demand information, scrutinise decisions, and seek clarification on issues that directly affect large sections of society, such as finances, governance, and the rules governing a major national sport.

Even as formal transparency mechanisms come under strain, civil society continues to exercise oversight — using disclosure, human rights bodies and the RTI Act to hold power to account. On 6 May 2026, [a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms \(ADR\) on the 2026 Assam Assembly](#) highlighted improvements in the criminal background of elected representatives while raising concerns about growing wealth concentration in state politics. The public disclosure of candidates' criminal and financial records strengthens transparency and accountability in the democratic process. On 26 June 2026, [The Jaintia National Council \(JNC\) urged the Meghalaya government to ensure transparent use of the Meghalaya Environment Protection and Restoration Fund \(MEPRF\)](#). Using information obtained through the RTI Act, the organisation raised concerns about support for coal mining-affected communities and submitted a memorandum calling for better implementation of the fund. The engagement reinforces the role of civil society in promoting transparent and accountable governance.

5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

Public attitudes toward civil society remain deeply contested, oscillating between recognition and suspicion. On one side, CSOs are celebrated for their role in peacebuilding, gender rights, anti-drug campaigns, and democratic participation, with leaders and institutions openly affirming their contributions. For example, [on 16 May 2026, Mizoram Chief Minister Laldhuma praised the Young Mizo Association \(YMA\) for its contributions to peace, social welfare, anti-drug awareness, and the preservation of Mizo culture](#). He encouraged the organisation to continue working with the government to promote community development and social harmony across the state.

Judicial voices defending freedom of expression and inclusivity further strengthen civic legitimacy. [At the launch of senior advocate Indira Jaising's memoir, *The Constitution Is My Home*, on 21 May 2026, the Supreme Court judge Justice B.V. Nagarathna delivered a powerful reminder that freedom of speech and expression is the lifeblood of democracy](#). She stressed that divergent thoughts and perspectives must always be allowed, as they enrich public discourse and safeguard democratic values. By commending Jaising's lifelong commitment to articulating alternative viewpoints, particularly on women's rights and the constitutional rights of marginalised communities, Justice Nagarathna underscored the importance of inclusivity and plurality in civic life. Her remarks reaffirm the constitutional guarantee under Article 19(1)(a) and highlight the judiciary's role in protecting spaces for diverse voices. It reinforces civic freedoms and strengthens democratic culture, promoting inclusivity.

Yet the discourse is equally marked by mistrust and polarisation. Sweeping judicial remarks, fraud allegations and narratives linking CSOs to illegal activity fuel reputational damage and erode public confidence — while collective pushback shows civic culture countering stigma. On 8 April 2026, [The Telangana High Court observed that several NGOs claiming to work for orphans and underprivileged children were not genuine but exploitative, making a broad institutional statement without identifying specific organisations](#). While the court's concern about fraudulent actors is legitimate, the sweeping nature of the observation risks deepening existing public suspicion toward civil society as a whole — making it harder for credible, genuinely serving organisations to build donor confidence, community trust, and operational

legitimacy at a time when the sector is already under significant regulatory and reputational pressure. On 15 June 2026, [the Karnataka Police have booked six people and the US-based CSOs, The Timothy Initiative \(TTI\)](#) for allegedly operating a clandestine network that illegally withdrew approximately ₹92.55 crore (\$9,995,240) through US-issued debit cards from ATMs across India, including in Naxalite-affected regions of Chhattisgarh. Such news stating the involvement of CSOs in illegal, terrorist activities is creating disturbance and giving local unfavourable sections a chance to create hurdles for the activities of CSOs. On 15 May 2026, [Chief Justice of India Surya Kant drew widespread controversy](#) after reported remarks likening unemployed youth — including RTI activists, journalists, and social media users — to "cockroaches" and "parasites," prompting civil society groups and commentators to condemn the language as stigmatising and harmful to civic participation. [Though the CJI subsequently clarified](#) that his remarks were misquoted and directed at those misusing professional platforms, the episode had already sparked a broader public debate about the judiciary's institutional tone toward civic actors and its potential chilling effect on youth engagement, RTI activism, and online advocacy. On 26 May, 2026 [more than 600 Members \(CSOs, ex officials, intellectuals\) wrote letters opposing the remarks on social activists](#) and demanded the withdrawal of the observations that Chief Justice of India Sri Suryakanth made in his statements. They became controversial on different issues; previously against unemployed youths, terming them as cockroaches, and now against environmentalists.

Ethnic conflict and competing narratives amplify exclusionary framings around citizenship and representation, while misinformation erodes trust and shrinks the space for reconciliation, seen most acutely in Manipur. Manipur has been in prolonged crisis since ethnic violence erupted in May 2023 between the majority Meitei community of the Imphal valley and the Kuki-Zo tribal communities of the surrounding hills, leaving over 250 dead, tens of thousands displaced, the state divided along ethnic lines, and under President's Rule since February 2025 — with citizenship and demography at the conflict's core, as Meitei groups demand a National Register of Citizens (NRC) with 1951 as the base year to address alleged migration from Myanmar, a framing Kuki-Zo communities reject as delegitimising their citizenship, while the 2027 census and delimitation exercise will determine each community's future political representation. Against this backdrop, on 10 May 2026, a coalition of 14 valley-based civil society organisations under the banner of 14 CSOs Kangleipak [condemned the office of the Inner Manipur Member of Parliament](#) for allegedly undermining their NRC demand and called for postponing the census and delimitation until citizenship concerns are resolved — demands framed as identity protection but which risk deepening polarisation and exclusionary narratives around citizenship and representation.

On 12 May 2026, [the Kuki CSO Working Committee rejected narratives linking a suspected drone attack in Kamjong district](#) on 7 May — in which several houses were burned — to foreign aggression or Myanmar-based militants, calling such claims misleading and divisive. The group warned that blanket accusations against the Kuki community deepen ethnic polarisation and undermine ongoing peace efforts, highlighting how competing narratives and misinformation are eroding trust in civil society actors and shrinking the space for reconciliation and humanitarian engagement in conflict-affected Manipur. On 8 June 2026, [thousands gathered in Imphal for a rally organised by a coalition of 14 civil society organisations, demanding the updating of the National Register of Citizens \(NRC\)](#) before the conduct of the Census, with protesters raising concerns over illegal immigration, demographic changes, and the potential impact of delimitation on indigenous community representation. Civil society leaders also called for the inclusion of Manipur government representatives in the high-powered committee examining demographic changes, reflecting the active — and increasingly assertive — role of organised civil society in shaping public discourse on citizenship and political representation in the state.

Even as its credibility is contested, civil society keeps dialogue alive — amplifying diverse voices, defending gender equality and democratic participation, and protecting the marginalised. This is the resilience of civic culture. Gender-based violence also tested the strength of community-led civil society. Examples such as Mizoram's apex women's organisation, Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), [called for collective action](#) on 13 May 2026, against the trafficking of Mizo women in Rudrapur. MHIP's call to

communities showed how civil society supports to guard their safety where formal protection falls short. Displacement and electoral-roll revisions raised sharp concerns about inclusive democratic participation. On 5 June 2026, [Kuki Inpi Manipur \(KIM\) flagged that nearly 59,000 internally displaced Kuki-Zo people](#), unable to return home, risked exclusion from the electoral process under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), prompting the Election Commission to reportedly consider special enrolment arrangements for displaced voters. Similarly, on 9 May 2026, the ['My Vote, My Right' coalition met Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah](#) — drawing in trade unions, Dalit groups and women's federations — and secured a commitment to protect citizens' votes, a model CSOs elsewhere are now citing in their own SIR advocacy. Yet the concerns only deepened as [the SIR completed one year on 26 June 2026 with nearly six crore names deleted](#) across 19 states and UTs; though the Supreme Court upheld its validity, civil society continued to warn of disenfranchisement — with marginalised and undocumented citizens struck from both voter rolls and linked welfare and ration entitlements, many finding out only on polling day.

These dynamics create a fragile environment where civil society must constantly defend its credibility even as it mediates crises and protects vulnerable communities. The overall picture is one of contested legitimacy: civil society remains a vital actor in shaping public debate and safeguarding democratic values, but its space is strained by suspicion, politicisation, and reputational risks. The resilience of civic culture lies in its ability to counter stigma with solidarity, amplify diverse voices, and keep dialogue alive in the face of division.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Internet shutdowns and platform bans continue to be deployed as tools of state control, curbing misinformation but also silencing communication and limiting civic participation. For example, on 7 April 2026, [following the killing of two children](#) in a bomb attack in Bishnupur district, the Manipur government [imposed an internet shutdown](#) across five districts, citing concerns over misinformation, hate speech, and the potential use of social media to incite violence. The restrictions remained in place until 18 April, significantly limiting access to information and digital communication, and hampering the ability of citizens, journalists, and civil society organisations to communicate, coordinate activities, and participate in public discourse during the unrest.

Increased regulation of the digital space is also exercised in content takedowns and platform restrictions, raising concerns about freedom of expression and online civic space. [Manipur authorities announced that around 3,200 social media posts had been removed and 187 accounts/pages blocked since June 2023](#), as per a report of 25 May 2026, to curb misinformation and maintain public order. [The Delhi High Court upheld the Centre's temporary ban on Telegram from 16 until 22 June](#) ahead of the NEET-UG 2026 re-examination, despite extensively questioning the proportionality of the move. Justice Tejas Karia had orally asked the Centre whether the rights of 150 million users could be curtailed because one set of citizens was appearing in an exam, with the Attorney General controversially describing Telegram's architecture as a "Frankenstein." Ultimately, the court ruled that "given the emergency nature, the reasons supplied are sufficient and Government has followed the procedure in Section 69A" of the IT Act, allowing the ban to remain in force through the exam date. While the judiciary engaged critically with the proportionality concern, it ultimately deferred to the executive emergency powers granted by the IT Act, signalling continued judicial caution in checking broad digital restrictions even when fundamental rights of a large user base are implicated.

The rise of AI-generated disinformation and deepfakes further threatens electoral integrity, underscoring the urgent need for stronger digital governance. For instance, on 8 April 2026, [Diaspora in Action for Human Rights and Democracy \(DAHARD\) reported the widespread use of AI-generated disinformation](#) and deepfakes during the Assam Assembly election campaign. This highlighted rising concerns about electoral integrity, digital governance, misinformation, and the impact of AI on democratic processes.

Against these pressures, responsible vulnerability disclosure and citizen-centric models show the potential of secure, trust-building digital systems built through collaboration between state institutions, civil society and independent experts. Following the declaration of CBSE Class 10 and 12 results on 13 May 2026, [the On-Screen Marking \(OSM\) system faced criticism over answer-sheet mix-ups, incorrect marks, and evaluation discrepancies](#). On 22 May 2026, 19-year-old ethical hacker Nisarga Adhikary [publicly disclosed serious security vulnerabilities that he said could have enabled unauthorised access to examiner accounts and manipulation of marks](#), after previously reporting the issues to authorities. While CBSE maintained that its live evaluation system had not been compromised, it worked with cybersecurity experts from IIT Kanpur and IIT Madras to review and strengthen the platform, with Adhikary contributing to the remediation process. The case highlights the importance of secure digital public infrastructure, responsible vulnerability disclosure, and collaboration between independent cybersecurity researchers and public institutions.

On 23 June 2026, [the Assam government launched the e-Zero FIR initiative to help police respond faster to cyber fraud cases](#). Complaints involving financial losses above ₹10 lakh, filed through the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal or helpline 1930, are automatically converted into Zero FIRs, allowing investigations to begin immediately and improving protection against online financial fraud. Such a citizen-centric digital justice model strengthens the enabling environment by giving vulnerable users a faster, more accessible route to redress against online fraud — reducing the fear and mistrust that deter less digitally-literate and lower-income communities from participating safely in the digital space, and offering a replicable model of state–citizen collaboration on digital safety.

The digital environment reflects a fragile equilibrium where restrictive measures and misinformation erode freedoms, yet innovations in cybersecurity and citizen-focused justice models offer pathways to a safer, more inclusive digital space.

Challenges and opportunities

The most significant challenge in the coming months will be the expected further tightening of the FCRA, following the twelve new conditions announced in June 2026, which leaves smaller health, education, and rights-based organisations most exposed — averting deterioration here will require coordinated advocacy backed by parliamentary voices, practical compliance and legal support for smaller CSOs, and donor willingness to sustain flexible, non-FCRA funding pathways. Alongside this, the transition to the new Income Tax framework demands accessible guidance and pooled compliance support so limited-capacity organisations are not penalised for inadvertent lapses; the steady weakening of RTI calls for legal defence of transparency tools and solidarity from media and legal networks; and sweeping negative portrayals of the sector need a proactive, sector-wide response that rebuilds trust with communities and donors. In conflict-affected and politically sensitive areas, internet shutdowns and concerns over exclusion from electoral rolls further underline the need for civil society to work with the Election Commission, state authorities, and international partners to secure accessible grievance redress and protect civic space.

Despite these pressures, there are some encouraging signs of civil society's resilience and continued relevance. Many state governments are recognising the value of working with civil society and are actively partnering with CSOs on the ground — from women's safety and child protection to environment and public health. These partnerships not only expand the reach of organisations but also give them a degree of institutional legitimacy and protection. Courts have continued to uphold fundamental rights and check administrative overreach, reminding us that legal advocacy remains a powerful tool. New funding mechanisms are opening up, giving non-profits access to corporate resources through regulated channels. Above all, when civil society comes together — sharing resources, amplifying each other's voices, and acting as one — it has shown that civil society organisations can still be resilient and accountable. The strength of Indian civil society has always been its people and its purpose, and that remains intact. Overall, while structural and regulatory challenges are real and deepening,

Indian civil society's capacity for innovation, coalition-building, and constructive engagement with both state and community offers meaningful grounds for continued impact.

Recommendations for civil society:

- Coalition-building strengthens resilience under regulatory pressure.
- Compliance support enables smaller NGOs to navigate scrutiny and sustain access to resources.
- Constructive state partnerships expand reach and enhance legitimacy.
- Diversified funding channels reduce dependence on foreign contributions.
- Transparency and engagement counter negative narratives and rebuild trust.
- Legal advocacy defends civic freedoms and strengthens accountability mechanisms.

For government (central and state):

- Ensure that FCRA and Income Tax provisions are implemented with clear guidance and a reasonable transition period, so that smaller organisations are not penalised for inadvertent, capacity-related lapses.
- Institutionalise meaningful consultation with civil society before notifying regulatory amendments — pre-legislative dialogue exposes implementation risks early, improves compliance, and builds shared ownership of reform.
- Preserve and strengthen transparency tools such as the RTI framework, which underpin accountable governance and public trust.
- Build on the growing model of state–CSO partnership by institutionalising consultative mechanisms and recognising civil society as a delivery and governance partner.
- Provide accessible grievance-redress mechanisms — particularly around electoral-roll revisions and digital restrictions — to protect the participation of marginalised communities.

For donors and philanthropy (domestic and international):

- Sustain flexible funding and support transition costs for organisations adapting to the tightening regulatory environment.
- Invest in the compliance, legal, and digital-security capacity of smaller and rights-based CSOs.
- Expand and de-risk domestic funding channels, including CSR and Social Stock Exchange routes, to reduce over-dependence on foreign contributions.

For media and academia:

- Counter sweeping negative portrayals of the sector with evidence-based coverage of civil society's contribution.
- Document and analyse civic-space trends to strengthen the evidence base for advocacy and policy dialogue.

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