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# Enabling Environment Snapshot

Chile

29 January 2025

## Context

In 2024, Chile continued to navigate the socio-political consequences of the failed attempts to replace its constitution, with the second draft being rejected by voters in December 2023. This rejection, where 62% of voters opposed the proposal, underscored widespread disillusionment. The process was [initially seen as](#) an opportunity to heal divisions, address long-standing social grievances, and pave the way toward a more inclusive and just society. However, [analysts](#) attribute the outcome to deep-seated mistrust in the political elites leading the process, coupled with rising voter apathy, which further weakened the legitimacy of the proposed reforms.

Political fragmentation intensified during the October 2024 municipal elections, where independent candidates won 103 out of 345 mayoral seats. Mayors in Chile are elected directly by voters, and these results reflect significant public dissatisfaction with traditional parties. In response, parties from across the political spectrum have proposed electoral reforms and alliances to reduce the growing influence of independents ([El Pais](#)).

Protests continued in Chile throughout 2024, particularly around issues such as pension reform, indigenous land rights, and demands for economic equity. While the state's response has included dialogue initiatives, concerns over law enforcement practices persist. In April 2023, the enactment of the Naín-Retamal Law, which increased penalties for crimes against police and established privileged self-defence rights for officers, raised alarms among human rights organisations. [Amnesty International](#) and other groups have warned that this legislation could lead to excessive use of force by law enforcement, potentially fostering impunity and increasing the risk of human rights violations.

The Mapuche conflict in southern Chile remains a focal point, involving long-standing territorial disputes and demands for land restitution. The government has declared recurring states of emergency in regions like Araucanía, deploying the military to address violence. While aimed at controlling the conflict, these measures have restricted civil society actors working in the region. For instance, restrictions on movement and public gatherings have hindered the ability of human rights organisations to monitor and advocate for indigenous rights ([Human Rights Watch](#)).

## 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Chile's 1980 constitution guarantees freedoms of expression, assembly, and association; however, their practical implementation remains inconsistent. Protests advocating for pension reform—aimed at replacing the unpopular privatised system with a more equitable public one—and for indigenous land rights have frequently faced police repression. Instances of excessive force during demonstrations, including the indiscriminate use of tear gas and mass detentions, have been well-documented. Notable examples include the 8 March 2021 [International Women's Day protest](#) and the [widespread 2019 social uprisings](#), both of which raised serious concerns about the disproportionate response to peaceful assemblies and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

In the Araucanía region, the ongoing Mapuche conflict—centred on demands for ancestral land restitution—has led to states of emergency and military deployments. These measures have restricted movement, limited public gatherings, and heightened tensions. Civil society organisations working to defend indigenous rights have reported increased surveillance, police intimidation and legal threats, fostering a climate of fear ([Human Rights Watch](#)).

While press freedom remains strong ([Freedom House](#)), journalists and activists have faced [online harassment](#), particularly during the October 2024 municipal elections. Disinformation campaigns and smear tactics have targeted those critical of the government or political elites, exacerbating polarisation. Hostility toward dissenting voices—especially from political figures and partisan media—has further strained Chile’s civic space.

## 2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

Chile’s legal framework generally supports civil society operations, with transparent registration processes regulated primarily under the Civil Code and [Law No. 20.500 on Associations and Citizen Participation in Public Management](#). This law establishes definitions and mechanisms for forming associations of citizens of public interest and defines ways in which these entities participate in the management of public authorities.

However, recent legal developments and gaps pose challenges. For example, the controversial "[Ley de Usurpaciones](#)", aimed at penalising unauthorised land occupations, has sparked criticism from Indigenous groups and advocacy organisations. Critics warn that the law’s vague definitions of illegal land use could be weaponised to criminalise peaceful protests demanding land restitution.

In a positive development, reforms to the [Transparency Law](#) in [2023](#) strengthened accountability measures by mandating greater disclosure from public institutions and encouraging civil society participation in governance processes. However, these mechanisms are not evenly accessible, particularly for smaller organisations in rural and Indigenous regions, which often lack the resources to navigate bureaucratic hurdles.

These dynamics highlight a mixed environment for civil society. While legal protections exist, operational barriers—such as limited access to decision-making processes and administrative inefficiencies—disproportionately affect Indigenous groups and grassroots organisations.

## 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Funding for civil society actors in Chile is moderately accessible, with resources coming primarily from international donors, private foundations, and government grants. Large, well-established organisations typically find it easier to secure funding, while smaller grassroots

groups—particularly those in rural and Indigenous areas—face significant challenges. Examples of bureaucratic hurdles include complex administrative processes for accessing government funding, such as lengthy approval timelines and excessive documentation requirements, which have been cited as barriers to participation in public programmes ([CIVICUS Monitor](#), [OECD Report 2024](#)).

Economic instability in 2024, with inflation projected at 4.8%, has further strained local funding streams, reducing private contributions and limiting philanthropic efforts ([Central Bank of Chile 2024 Report](#)).

Opportunities exist through international cooperation. Chile's participation in the [Escazú Agreement](#), which emphasises access to environmental justice, and its role in [UNESCO's Indigenous People's Policy](#), have opened doors for targeted funding aimed at climate action and Indigenous advocacy.

However, concerns persist about legislative changes affecting foreign funding. A 2024 parliamentary discussion proposed amendments to the Law on Associations, potentially introducing stricter reporting requirements for international donations. Civil society actors worry that these changes could create additional administrative burdens and discourage foreign contributions, jeopardising the sustainability of smaller organisations.

## 4. State openness and responsiveness

The relationship between civil society and the Chilean government in 2024 has been mixed. On one hand, the government has engaged with civil society organisations (CSOs) on issues such as constitutional reform and environmental policies. However, these consultations often lack depth and fail to incorporate meaningful input, particularly from marginalised groups such as indigenous communities, women, and rural organisations ([UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights](#)).

An example is the consultation process for indigenous land rights under the controversial "Ley de Usurpaciones," which was criticised for being superficial and not addressing the core concerns of Mapuche organisations ([Amnesty International](#)). Similarly, during the constitutional reform negotiations, CSOs reported limited opportunities to influence key provisions, with discussions dominated by political elites.

Despite these limitations, opportunities for collaboration have emerged in areas such as climate policy, where the government has partnered with CSOs to address commitments under the Paris Agreement. However, civil society actors continue to call for more inclusive and transparent mechanisms to ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes, particularly on policies affecting vulnerable groups ([Freedom House](#)).

## 5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

In 2024, civil society in Chile has been portrayed in public discourse as both a vital advocate for social justice and a polarising actor in political debates. The failure of the constitutional reform process has deepened divisions, with some political figures criticising civil society organisations (CSOs) as either perpetuating partisan agendas or hindering progress on national unity. For example, right-leaning parties have accused Indigenous and feminist organisations of fuelling division, while left-leaning groups have dismissed business-aligned CSOs as elitist and out of touch ([OECD 2024 Report, Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Chile](#)).

Despite this polarisation, CSOs have played a central role in advancing inclusivity, particularly for women and Indigenous communities. Campaigns advocating for gender equality, such as those marking International Women's Day, received widespread media coverage and public support ([Freedom House](#)). Similarly, Indigenous organisations have raised awareness about land rights and restitution, though their advocacy has faced resistance from both political elites and private sector actors involved in disputed land claims ([Amnesty International](#)).

While civil society continues to foster democratic participation, marginalised groups still encounter significant barriers to achieving meaningful representation in political discourse. This underscores the need for broader recognition and inclusion of diverse civic voices in Chile's evolving political culture.

## Challenges and Opportunities

In the coming months, civil society in Chile is expected to face challenges stemming from deepening political polarisation and its impact on democratic processes. The contentious debate surrounding the "Ley de Usurpaciones" may exacerbate divisions, particularly as it risks criminalising Indigenous land restitution movements and other grassroots protests. Additionally, economic instability, with inflation projected at 4.8%, will likely strain resources for smaller, community-based organisations, limiting their capacity to sustain operations.

Nonetheless, significant opportunities exist to enhance the enabling environment. Chile's active role in the [Escazú Agreement](#) provides a key moment for civil society to strengthen partnerships with the government and advocate for environmental justice. Similarly, the anticipated rollout of municipal participatory budgets in 2024, as part of Chile's efforts to increase local governance transparency, offers a platform for civil society to advocate for inclusion and reforms at the community level ([OECD Report on Chile's Municipal Reforms](#)). These developments provide pathways for civil society to amplify diverse voices and promote democratic values across the country.

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