



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Chile

May 2025

Summary

In the first period of 2025, Chile's civil society operated within a mixed and evolving landscape. While fundamental freedoms are constitutionally protected, their enforcement remains uneven—requiring continued monitoring. Police repression of protests persists, and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ individuals has risen sharply, limiting their civic engagement. Chile maintains a generally supportive legal framework for civil society, though challenges in transparency and digital regulation—while not yet structurally disruptive—warrant close monitoring. Progress includes the advancement of the National Care System bill, driven by women-led organisations, and legislative efforts to increase women's political representation. However, Indigenous and LGBTIQ+ groups remain significantly underrepresented. Funding remains a challenging issue, especially after the “Caso Convenios” scandal, which damaged public trust and added bureaucratic burdens to civil society organisations. Nonetheless, state-supported initiatives such as the 2025 Fund for Public Interest Organisations continue to provide key resources. Digital security is a growing concern: Chile faced over 6 billion cyberattacks in 2024. Despite policy improvements, journalists and activists remain vulnerable to online threats and disinformation. Ahead of the November 2025 presidential and parliamentary elections, civil society must navigate both risks and promising openings to shape the country's democratic trajectory.

Context

In the first months of 2025, Chile remained in a state of political uncertainty following the rejection of a second constitutional proposal in December 2023. This outcome deepened public disillusionment and intensified distrust in traditional political institutions. The failed constitutional processes have heightened polarisation, significantly shaping the enabling environment (EE) for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Chile. However, the extent to which this volatility translates into concrete operational constraints for CSOs is not yet clear and should be monitored moving forward.

Throughout 2024, political fragmentation became more evident, as independent candidates gained momentum—winning a considerable number of mayoralties during the October 2024 municipal elections. This trend reflects growing citizen fatigue with mainstream political parties, which have struggled to deliver on longstanding demands. In response, some political actors have pushed legislative initiatives that threaten to limit the influence of independent and civil society actors. This is with the intention of “ordering” or “regulating” participation, under arguments of stability or governability, but which in practice may exclude or discourage the action of organised civil society, raising concerns about democratic inclusivity.

Protests and demonstrations continued in 2024 and early 2025, especially on issues such as pension reform, Indigenous rights, and economic justice—many rooted in the unresolved demands of the 2019 social uprising. State responses have varied, with some cases involving [excessive use of force, including at the 2025 International Women's Day march](#). In parallel, the Mapuche conflict in southern Chile persists, with military interventions and police actions affecting the civic space for Indigenous and territorial organisations.

This evolving landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for CSOs as they seek to protect civic space, promote democratic participation, and advocate for inclusive policies in a pivotal election year. While the broader political flux and fragmentation may not uniformly affect all organisations,

they contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty that warrants continued monitoring—especially as potential legislative shifts and institutional volatility could reshape civil society’s operating space over time.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Chile’s constitution guarantees freedoms of expression, assembly, and association; however, practical enforcement remains inconsistent. The previous [snapshot](#) noted that social protests often face police repression, including instances of excessive use of force. For example, more than 10,000 complaints of brutality by police and Armed Forces were filed in 2019, yet only one percent [has been resolved as](#) of October 2024. Public awareness around police violence has grown, and although these incidents still occur, their impact may be more localised or situational depending on the context of specific demonstrations.

Recent examples include the [repression of protesters during the 2025 International Women’s Day March](#), where police dispersed crowds using water cannon. Additionally, violent protests occurred in late March related to a [controversial fishing bill](#), which artisanal fishermen argued was detrimental to their livelihoods. These protests resulted in clashes and multiple arrests.

The LGBTIQ+ community is facing a more sustained and systemic deterioration of rights. In March 2025, the 23rd Report on the Human Rights of Sexual and Gender Diversity revealed a 78.7% increase in cases and complaints of discrimination, totalling 2,847 incidents in 2024. Alarmingly, the report also [documented regressions in LGBTIQ+ rights](#) across all three branches of government—an unprecedented trend since the return to democracy.

For example, at the legislative level, the National Congress passed a bill in the Budget Law that prohibited the Ministry of Health from financing hormone therapy for transgender children and adolescents. At the judicial level, on the other hand, the Criminal Court of San Antonio ruled out the punishment of femicide for the murderer of a trans woman only because the victim had not rectified her birth certificate. Lastly, the Executive broke with the government’s tradition, first introduced in 2012, that when pushing any new policy, regulation or law that made any reference to non-discrimination, it would explicitly mention sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories. This represents a significant and broad threat to fundamental freedoms, severely affecting the political and civic participation of the LGBTIQ+ community.

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

Chile generally maintains a legal framework that supports civil society operations through transparent processes. However, challenges remain, particularly in digital regulation, where the [current legal system has not yet adapted to new technologies](#). The current lack of adaptation, while not yet critically disruptive, may have an unclear immediate impact on the majority of CSOs. It nonetheless requires ongoing monitoring due to its potential implications for data privacy, online engagement, and access to digital tools.

Transparency issues also persist in the public sector: [two-thirds of evaluated state-owned companies were found to have violations due to outdated, incomplete, or missing information on](#)

[sensitive matters such as personnel and salaries](#). While these transparency violations do not yet appear to directly affect CSOs, they signal potential governance challenges that could weaken institutional trust and hinder collaborative frameworks in the future. As such, their effects on the enabling environment warrant continuous monitoring.

Regarding recent policies, the implementation of the [controversial "Ley de Usurpaciones"](#) adopted in 2019 continues to face strong criticism from civil society organisations focused on housing, following over 60 evictions carried out under this law.

On a more positive note, there have been significant advances in gender equality. On 18th March 2025, the Chamber of Deputies approved a bill creating the National Care System. As of 7 May 2025, it is still pending Senate approval. This initiative aims to formally recognise caregiving work—primarily performed by women—and improve political participation for those who care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Organisations such as ["Yo Cuido"](#) and ["Ronda Chile"](#) played a key role in ensuring that unpaid caregivers were present and heard during the legislative process.

Nonetheless, structural barriers remain. According to a 2024 [study by UN Women and the Ministry of Women and Gender Equity](#), half of the women surveyed reported a lack of organisational culture that supports work-life balance, limiting their full political participation. Also, in March 2025, a bill was introduced in the Senate to promote women's participation in candidacies for popularly elected bodies, aiming to reduce the existing gender gap. However, further efforts are still needed to improve the [representation of LGBTIQ+ individuals and Indigenous peoples](#), for whom institutional solutions remain scarce.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

As reported in the first [snapshot](#), Chilean CSOs must continuously search for ways to fund their operational work and projects. In addition, corruption cases and situations involving the misappropriation of public funds by CSOs, like ["Caso Convenios"](#) and ["Procultura"](#), make it even more difficult for CSOs to secure funding from both public and private sectors. ["Caso Convenios"](#) is a political scandal and a case of misappropriation of public funds for foundations and NGOs that was deeply criticized by the citizens and the political sphere. For this, a [recent study](#) of 2023 analysing the relationship between the State and Civil Society Organisations found that 55% of organisations whose resources were affected by the institutional trust crisis on CSOs had to implement measures such as reducing operating expenses and adjusting remuneration to maintain operations despite these challenges: all the organisations were being judged by the collusion of a few.

Despite these difficulties, public funding remains an important resource for CSOs. In March 2025, the [Fund for Strengthening Public Interest Organisations](#) was launched, led by the Ministry General Secretariat of Government. The fund offers a total budget of USD \$1,774,401—an increase of 4% from the previous year—to support the work of social organisations promoting citizen rights, gender equity, social assistance, education, health, and environmental protection, with a priority on youth and children's projects. Organisations may apply for up to \$2,200 for local projects (one commune), \$4,400 for regional projects (two or more communes in the same region), and \$10,900 for national initiatives (spanning more than one region). This funding opportunity reflects a continued effort by the State to collaborate with civil society toward shared objectives.

However, the long-term implications of the ["Caso Convenios"](#) corruption scandal continue to create uncertainty around the future of CSO funding. This case - also known as caso Fundaciones - is a

[scandal of embezzlement of more than 14 billion pesos \(≈ USD 16.4 million\) through direct transfers of public resources to foundations linked to the ruling party](#), investigated since June 2023 by the Attorney General's Office and the Comptroller's Office for evading fiscal controls and irregularly financing political activities. While public support remains available, the State support has become more cautious and bureaucratically complex: authorities have added administrative measures to avoid corruption. This evolving context requires continued monitoring to assess how trust recovery efforts and institutional responses will affect the financial sustainability of civil society in the coming years.

4. State openness and responsiveness

One important event where state openness was apparent was the 69th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) held in March 2025, which commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration. There, [Chile played a prominent role](#), by bringing the largest delegation of the session—22 representatives from civil society. This significant move by the Ministry of Women and Gender Equity not only provided a vital platform for civil society actors but also made a powerful political statement by giving them a central role in international discussions on gender equality.

However, this engagement contrasts with the more mixed relationship observed between the Chilean government and civil society that is still a challenge in 2025. How to incorporate different types of actors, support funding for CSOs and to open civil participation is a development that the State needs to keep working on, in particular in 2025 as it is an electoral year. With this, the State has the opportunity to be an important actor for civic engagement and be a responsible provider of official information about the electoral process.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

The first [Snapshot](#) delved into the advances CSOs have accomplished in society: they remain as a fundamental actor that promotes different issues often ignored by society, such as the inclusion of minorities or advocating for issues neglected by the State. Nevertheless, these organisations are not always portrayed in a positive way. For example, during the constitutional process, CSOs faced significant challenges in promoting their agendas. As a result, it became difficult for them to be seen, not as obstacles to the process, but as important contributors to it.

Similarly, at the end of 2024, the results of the [Survey on the relationship between the State and Civil Society Organisations Post “Caso Convenios”](#) were released. The survey, which gathered the responses of 140 organisations, shows there is a complex scenario that affects both the operation of civil society organisations and the provision of services to thousands of beneficiaries nationwide.

More than 80% of the organisations responded that the bureaucratic burden, mainly from the State and financing processes, has increased excessively, complicating their work. In addition, 60% of CSOs reported that they believe that the state's trust in their work has decreased considerably, thus affecting the relationship with their counterparts in the public sector. Additionally, 60% of the respondents said that their incomes decreased considerably during the period 2022-2023, not only impacting their operational work, but also their ability to fund their core programmes. In this sense, the trust in CSOs needs to be strengthened, which is challenging in the current context of high distrust in institutions.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

In Chile, civil society can generally access and share information online without government-imposed internet shutdowns or systematic censorship. However, digital security and protections remain weak in several areas. Cyberattacks have sharply increased. In 2024, Chile faced over 6.4 billion attempted cyberattacks in just the first nine months, [affecting sectors like healthcare, logistics, and finance](#). Notable cases include a ransomware attack on BancoEstado, which forced temporary bank branch closures, and an attack on the [Chilean Army in 2023 that compromised institutional networks](#).

In response to these escalating threats, Chile has taken steps to strengthen its cybersecurity framework. In January 2025, Chile joined the Counter Ransomware Initiative and is implementing its [National Cybersecurity Policy 2023–2028](#), along with the creation of a National Cybersecurity Agency to coordinate responses across sectors.

Despite these steps, online harassment remains a serious concern. Journalists and activists—especially those covering environmental and Indigenous issues—have reported being subjected to targeted disinformation campaigns and threats. [UNESCO condemned the violence against environmental journalists in Chile in 2024](#). While these threats often unfold online, physical violence also persists: the 2022 murder of journalist Francisca Sandoval, who was shot while covering a protest, remains a powerful symbol of the risks faced by the [press and continues to fuel demands for stronger protections for journalists' safety and freedom](#). Although Chile has made commitments to improve cybersecurity, civil society actors continue to call for better enforcement of privacy rights, stronger protections against digital violence, and accountability for online abuse.

Challenges and Opportunities

CSOs face a context of political change and heightened public debate as Chile prepares for presidential and congressional elections in November 2025. The primary elections in June are already generating increased political activity and citizen engagement. This electoral period creates a unique opportunity for civil society to influence public debate, engage with decision-makers, and promote democratic participation. As political agendas take shape, CSOs can leverage this moment to advocate for their priorities and contribute to a more open and inclusive democratic process.

However, these opportunities coexist with notable challenges. Alongside presidential elections, Chile will also hold parliamentary elections, exposing hundreds of candidates—and by extension, the broader democratic environment—to digital violence and misinformation. A persistent concern from previous elections is the [absence of legislation addressing the spread of false news in political campaigns](#). The Electoral Service lacks investigative and sanctioning powers in this area, leaving a regulatory gap that threatens electoral integrity. This disproportionately affects women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, Indigenous peoples, and other marginalised communities.

While these issues may not immediately impact every CSO equally, the uncertain trajectory of electoral dynamics and digital threats requires continued monitoring. Distinguishing these evolving challenges from more clearly defined obstacles is essential for understanding the enabling environment's complexity and anticipating future implications.

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