



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Brazil

June 2025

Context

Since 2023, President Lula’s administration has been working to rebuild Brazil’s democratic institutions and participatory mechanisms, which were severely undermined during Jair Bolsonaro’s presidency (2019–2022). That period was marked by systematic attacks on civil society, the dismantling of participatory councils, and the criminalization of human rights defenders. These actions deliberately weakened both the responsiveness of the state and the institutional fabric sustaining civil society organizations (CSOs).

While the current government has signaled a renewed commitment to democratic engagement—reestablishing national councils, launching participatory planning tools, and reopening dialogue with social movements—the legacy of institutional erosion continues to hinder progress. CSOs still operate in a climate of regulatory instability, limited access to public funding, and persistent public distrust, particularly in areas related to human rights and environmental justice. These structural challenges are compounded by a highly polarized political environment and lingering bureaucratic constraints.

As of 2025, Brazil remains in a transitional phase. The civil society sector is mobilizing to reclaim its role in shaping public policy, but many of the enabling conditions required for effective participation and advocacy are still being rebuilt. This baseline report assesses the current operating environment for CSOs in Brazil based on the six enabling principles defined by the EU SEE Platform.

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Despite [constitutional guarantees](#)—such as freedom of association (Art. 5, XVII), freedom of expression (Art. 5, IV and IX), and the right to peaceful assembly (Art. 5, XVI)—and international commitments to human rights, Brazil has experienced serious setbacks in protecting fundamental freedoms. Since 2023, the new government has [signalled](#) an intention to reverse this trajectory, but the institutional impacts of the previous administration persist.

Between January 2022 and August 2023, Along [documented](#) a resurgence of bureaucratic criminalization of dissent and civil society—defined as the use of administrative, legal, and political tools to delegitimize social movements. This includes the misuse of public oversight tools — such as audits, demands for excessive documentation, and retroactive sanctions — to create reputational and financial risks for civil society actors. Often framed as “accountability” or “transparency” measures, these practices disproportionately affect smaller organizations and those working in politically sensitive areas such as Indigenous rights, land reform, and [environmental defence](#).

In August 2023, [the Senate initiated the third Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry \(CPI\) on NGOs](#), targeting civil society organizations working in the Amazon. The commission reproduced unfounded narratives accusing environmental groups of undermining national development on behalf of foreign interests.

In 2023, [208 Indigenous leaders were murdered](#), making Brazil the second most dangerous country for land defenders. This highlights ongoing state failure in protecting human rights activists.

In 2024, the National Federation of Journalists [reported](#) 144 assaults and 11 judicial censorship cases against investigative journalism, notably in environmental and corruption reporting. This pattern of legal harassment fosters journalists' self-censorship and exacerbates power asymmetries between the state and civil society.

In response to these challenges, the current administration has reinstated participatory bodies such as [Special Commission on Political Disappearances and Deaths](#) and reactivated [inter-ministerial commissions](#) involving civil society actors. The government also committed to combating violence against human rights defenders by [supporting](#) the [Escazú Agreement](#) and relaunching the [National Program](#) for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Environmentalists, and Communicators. However, implementation remains uneven, especially at the subnational level, where local authorities often continue practices established under the previous administration.

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

From 2022 to 2025, Brazil maintained a regulatory framework that in theory enables civil society organizations (CSOs) to operate. This framework is grounded in the [Federal Constitution](#) (Art. 5, XVII), which guarantees freedom of association, and further regulated by [Law 13.019/2014](#) — the Regulatory Framework for Civil Society Organizations (MROSC) — and its federal implementing decree (Decree [8.726/2016](#)). These instruments establish the legal basis for partnerships with the state, set rules for public calls for proposals, and recognize the autonomy of CSOs. Despite these provisions, inconsistencies in implementation and interpretation - especially at the subnational level - continue to hinder the effectiveness of these protections.

Dispute resolution also remains a challenge: in several interviews compiled in [Abong's Bureaucratic Criminalization Report](#) CSOs reported being required to repay funds or respond to audit claims for partnerships finalized more than a decade earlier, illustrating the long-term impact of legal ambiguity.

Abong's broader institutional monitoring reveals that government attempts to question the legitimacy of CSOs have created a climate of legal unpredictability, despite formal protections under the Constitution (Art. 5, XVII).

Although progress has been made, challenges persist. In 2024, the federal government launched a [decree](#) to streamline procedures and clarify documentation rules for partnerships under the MROSC. At the subnational level, only São Paulo enacted Decree [63.541/2024](#), establishing clearer timelines for proposal evaluation and final accountability reports. These efforts aim to reduce bureaucratic delays and legal uncertainty, yet many states and municipalities have not adopted equivalent frameworks. Moreover, while mechanisms such as administrative appeals and ombudspersons (*ouvidorias*) are formally available, they remain underutilized due to lack of technical support and legal clarity. As noted by [Abong](#), legal unpredictability and retroactive sanctions continue to compromise the enabling environment for CSOs, despite constitutional and regulatory guarantees.

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

[Brazil is home to nearly 900,000 civil society organizations](#) as of 2024, which employ approximately 3 million people and represent 5% of GDP. However, fewer than 5,000 (under 0.6%) received federal funding, reflecting severe resource gaps for most organizations.

The fiscal austerity imposed by Constitutional Amendment [95/2016](#), which froze public expenditures for 20 years, significantly curtailed funding for social programs managed by CSOs. This has created chronic uncertainty, particularly in areas like education, health, and climate resilience. However, the Amazon Fund (*Fundo Amazônia*) has since been reactivated under the current administration, with significant disbursements in 2025. The Fund's resurgence illustrates a positive shift in climate financing, yet it remains a [specific case](#), not sufficient to offset pervasive austerity constraints

Brazilian CSOs depend heavily on international aid and private philanthropy to supplement scarce public funding. According to the most recent World Bank data, Brazil received USD 577 million in net ODA in [2022](#). While the 2024 DAC data aren't yet country-specific, OECD records show a [global decline in ODA to USD 212.1 billion \(–7.1%\)](#), signaling potential reductions for recipients like Brazil.

Domestic philanthropy shows notable scale: the [Brazilian Philanthropic Landscape \(IDIS, 2024\)](#) highlights strengthened regional funds and a growing culture of giving to social impact causes.

Yet access remains unequal: grassroots groups face bureaucratic hurdles—banking restrictions on foreign transfers, complex tax exemptions under Law [13.800/2019](#), and high administrative costs. As a result, international and philanthropic funds are critical, but reforms are needed to broaden access and equitably support diverse CSOs across Brazil. Smaller CSOs are often [excluded from public and private funding](#) channels due to technical barriers, excessive report demands and lack of institutional recognition at municipal level. As a result, international cooperation and philanthropic funds play a crucial role in supporting civil society.

4. State Openness and Responsiveness

In 2025, Brazil remained fully committed to the Open Government Partnership (OGP). It served as a Steering Committee co-chair and implemented its [6th National Action Plan](#) (2023–2027).

However, the [OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism \(IRM\)](#) notes that while 1,889 votes from 541 participants through platforms like Participa+Brasil shaped themes such as infrastructure transparency and open science, not all contributions were directly incorporated into the final commitments — some were merged, reformulated, or excluded.

Civil society has played an active role in monitoring policy implementation, particularly through platforms such as [Fala.BR](#) (speak.br) and [Participa+Brasil](#)—in tracking policy implementation Brazil ranks 51st in the [Open Data Inventory](#) with a score of 68/100, indicating continued shortcomings in budget transparency, contract-level monitoring, and laws-in-force datasets.

Another example of participation is Brazil's [Participatory Budgeting pilots](#) in federal programs—though these initiatives remain localized and non-systematic outside major urban centers.

Despite institutional mechanisms existing, implementation gaps, limited feedback loops, and regional inequalities continue to undermine effective CSO engagement.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Public trust in civil society organizations (CSOs) in Brazil remains moderate. According to the [2024 Edelman Trust Barometer](#), only 53% of Brazilians expressed trust in NGOs, below the 63% average among [developing countries](#).

Public skepticism is often linked to negative media narratives, particularly when CSOs work in politically sensitive areas such as Indigenous rights or environmental protection. In 2023, this sentiment was amplified by high-profile congressional inquiries, such as the [Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry \(CPI\) on NGOs in the Amazon](#), which ended with indictments against public officials and civil society leaders, including the president of ICMBio—despite limited evidence of wrongdoing. Likewise, the [CPI on the Landless Workers' Movement \(MST\)](#) publicly framed social movements as criminal organizations, reinforcing hostile narratives.

Public skepticism toward CSOs in Brazil is often fueled by hostile media and disinformation. A 2023–2024 MDPI [study](#) on anti-sustainability narratives revealed that far-right WhatsApp and Telegram groups spread content framing environmental defenders as anti-development traitors, using thousands of links and conspiratorial rhetoric. In May 2025, *The Guardian* warned that developments ahead of COP 30 in Belém show increased attention to Indigenous and forest defenders.

One of the most visible examples of negative public discourse occurred in August 2023, when the Senate launched a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) on NGOs operating in the Amazon. The commission amplified [unfounded narratives](#) portraying environmental organizations as obstacles to national development, reinforcing public suspicion and hostility toward civil society actors.

Meanwhile, civic engagement continues to grow in Brazil. According to a 2024 article by Open [Government Partnership](#), the number of people involved in civic activities has remained high since the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting a stronger culture of solidarity and community participation. This trend reinforces the importance of informal civic practices in building social trust and legitimacy for civil society initiatives.

Civil society in Brazil has been developing coordinated strategies to highlight the role of CSOs and promote positive narratives and evidence in public debate. One prominent example is the initiative [Sociedade Viva](#), launched in 2023 by a coalition of organizations by disseminating success stories and social impact cases across digital and traditional media. Another example is the [Comuá Network](#), an independent platform that connects thematic and community funds, community foundations, and donor organizations. It mobilizes resources from multiple sources to strengthen groups, collectives, movements, and civil society organizations engaged in socio-environmental justice, human rights, and community development. In late 2024, the Parliamentary Front in Defense of CSOs ([FPOSC](#)) was reactivated with support from a broad coalition of actors.

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

In 2024 and 2025, Brazil's digital environment remained marked by a tension between formal legal protections and practical enforcement gaps. While the Marco Civil da Internet ([Law](#)

[12.965/2014](#)) guarantees net neutrality and user rights, and the General Data Protection Law (LGPD – [Law 13.709/2018](#)) regulates personal data use, challenges persist regarding regulatory clarity, institutional capacity, and political interference. Civil society actors [have expressed concern](#) over the lack of a national strategy for digital rights and the absence of mechanisms to guarantee freedom of expression and protection from surveillance online.

In one emblematic case, the Brazilian Supreme Court ordered the [suspension of X](#) (formerly Twitter) in August 2024 due to the platform's repeated refusal to comply with national legal standards. Justice Alexandre de Moraes imposed a daily fine of R\$ 100,000 and authorized the freezing of assets from X's affiliate Starlink to ensure [enforcement](#). Elon Musk [publicly criticized the decision](#) and threatened to shut down the company's operations in Brazil, arguing against what he called censorship. This episode highlighted not only the firm stance of Brazilian institutions in defending constitutional legality, but also the urgency of implementing comprehensive regulation for digital platforms that systematically spread fake news and refuse to cooperate with judicial oversight. The lack of effective regulation enables transnational companies to interfere in democratic processes without accountability.

In addition to these national cases, [Access Now](#) also recorded a brief suspension of Telegram in April 2023, ordered by a federal judge in Espírito Santo, after the platform failed to comply with judicial requests related to extremist content. Although both measures were lifted after legal compliance, they reveal how judicial enforcement in Brazil is increasingly shaped by the challenges posed by transnational platforms. These decisions have triggered broader debate on the need to strengthen regulatory frameworks that ensure both digital rights and institutional accountability.

Despite the judiciary's role in enforcing national standards, civil society actors have [warned](#) that enforcement in the absence of clear and participatory regulation risks reinforcing asymmetries of power and limiting transparency. While no evidence of targeted regional shutdowns during protests in 2024 was found, digital civic space remains vulnerable to discretionary restrictions, data exploitation, and disinformation flows. A long-term solution requires not only reactive enforcement, but also proactive, rights-based digital governance.

Challenges and Opportunities

Looking ahead, civil society in Brazil is expected to continue navigating a complex institutional environment marked by regional disparities and ongoing political tensions. Key challenges include the persistence of legal uncertainty, limited municipal implementation of participatory mechanisms, and increasing financial constraints for grassroots organizations. At the same time, opportunities are emerging through Brazil's role in the Open Government Partnership, new legislative debates on digital platform regulation, and the growing visibility of civic actors in public discourse. These dynamics create both risks and entry points for reinforcing civic space and democratic participation in 2025.

To maintain and strengthen the enabling environment, there is a need for:

- Continuous monitoring of government actions and advocacy for greater state effectiveness in guaranteeing fundamental rights;
- Advocacy with platforms and parliamentary fronts to improve the implementation of the MROSC and facilitate access for CSOs to public partnerships;

- Promote structured dialogues with funding entities to reduce bureaucracy in accountability processes and to establish partnerships more aligned with the Brazilian context;
- Invest in ongoing training on resource management, fundraising, and financial sustainability for CSOs;
- Collective action in engaged popular communication to build positive narratives that enhance public recognition of CSOs and their work;
- Political advocacy within institutional spaces and active resistance to narratives that criminalize the work of CSOs, in defense and protection of civic space;
- Proactive engagement in the regulation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the protection of digital rights, communicating and shaping positive narratives about the democratic value of such regulation.

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