



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment

Snapshot

Mongolia

August 2025

Context

After eight years under one-party rule, Mongolia [amended](#) its [Constitution](#) (See Clause 20 and 21) in 2023, laying the ground for representation of more parties in the Parliament. Despite the result of the 2024 Parliamentary election, where five parties were represented, three parties, holding 118 seats out of a total of 126, established a [Coalition government](#), eroding hopes for a stronger opposition. According to V-DEM Institute's Democracy [report](#), Mongolia is one of 19 countries where legal and financial barriers to forming a party are becoming increasingly more common, and it no longer fulfills the basic requirements for a democratic election.

Mongolia's civic space was [downgraded](#) from 'Narrowed' to 'Obstructed' in the 2024 CIVICUS assessment. Since then, the country's legislative authorities have not initiated notable efforts to improve the situation. Criminalisation of human rights defenders for their legitimate and vital activities raises concerns as existing legal frameworks continue to be utilised to shut down critical voices. According to a 2025 [paper](#) by the Open Society Foundation, there are a total of 810 clauses and regulations in 318 laws currently in effect in the country that may have negative impact on the realisation of human rights. Legal restrictions on civil society organisations and freedom of expression, coordinated disinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting civil society actors, exacerbated by underlying weak reputation of civil society and media organisations, play a vital role in limiting civic space.

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Article 16 of the [Constitution of Mongolia](#) recognises freedom of the press, expression, and assembly. In addition, a number of [key laws are awaiting amendment](#) under the current government, which purportedly seeks to leave its mark as a human rights-oriented administration. The government has [recognised](#) that there are numerous violations of human rights due to insufficient legal safeguards.

In response, it has submitted several legislative proposals to parliament, including the [Law on Regulating Demonstration](#), with removal of the need for granting permission before a protest. The [Press Freedom Bill](#) aims to strengthen protections for journalists, regulate media ownership transparency, create an independent media regulator, ensure fair allocation of state advertising, promote pluralism, and establish clearer rules against censorship and political influence in the media sector. The [amendment to the package of laws on human rights](#) seeks to harmonise Mongolia's legislation with international human rights standards by expanding legal aid, defining and preventing serious abuses, limiting detention penalties, streamlining proceedings, refining travel and secrecy rules, ensuring independent regulation, strengthening human rights education for lawyers, and embedding rights safeguards into national development policy.

Despite the proposed change, Mongolia's 1998 [Press Freedom Act](#) is still in effect, and press freedom is still under threat. For instance, on 17 March 2025, eight employees of a local media startup Noorog were [detained](#) following their announcement of the release date for their documentary "18 days", which documented the election process. Their equipment was held for 18 days before being partially returned, and charges shifted from national security violations under Article 19.9.1 of the Criminal Code to cyber gambling and abetting suicide. Civil society actors fear the Criminal Code is being misused to target journalists, echoing concerns raised in an Amnesty International 2025 [report](#).

The right to peaceful assembly also continues to be threatened. In September 2024, during Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to Mongolia, activists from the "NoWar" movement organised a peaceful demonstration before being [detained](#) and taken away from the spot by the police. According to the current [Law on Regulating Demonstration](#), citizens are obligated to acquire permission before organising a protest. In case the permission has not

been issued, the demonstration is deemed illegal. The Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs have [submitted a bill](#) to ease the restrictions on [peaceful demonstration](#), but the proposed bill might make matters worse as it includes vague clauses that can be interpreted differently in various situations.

On 20 January 2023, the Parliament passed two laws, “[The Law on Protecting Human Rights on Social Media](#)” and “[Amendment to the Law on National Military](#)”. The former law received strong public opposition on grounds that there was no public consultation and the fact that it was passed just 2-3 days after its submission. It was later [vetoed by the President](#) for violating the “[Law on Legislation](#)”.

The “Amendment to the Law on National Military”, which was left unnoticed in the shadow of the outcry concerning the “[The Law on Protecting Human Rights on Social Media](#)”, poses a significant threat to civil society. This [amendment](#) broadens the locations where citizens can be inspected without prior authorisation and opens additional funding sources for the military bypassing Parliamentary oversight.

[Experts say](#) that early symptoms of closing down on civil society started in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the Municipal office received 32 requests to organise public events, out of which seven requests to organise peaceful demonstrations were not registered, while state organisations were able to organise public events freely.

Between [2020 and 2022, out of 2694 arrests, 2674](#) people were arrested without a court decision, meaning 99.2 percent of all arrests for three years were carried out without due process. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that in Mongolia, 99.3% of arrests in 2020 and 98.3% in 2021 were carried out without a prior court warrant ([A/HRC/54/51/Add.2](#)).

2. Supportive Legal Framework for the Work of Civil Society Actors

Mongolia has a generally supportive legal framework for civil society actors. The [1997 Law on Non-Governmental Organizations](#) governs the formation, operation and financing of NGOs in Mongolia, defining them as “non-profit, self-governing entities established voluntarily by citizens or legal persons, independent from the state”, and distinguishing between public benefit and mutual benefit organisations. The law is applicable to all non-governmental organisations except political parties, trade unions, and churches and monasteries. Trade unions are regulated under the [Law on the Rights of Trade Unions](#), which lays out registration, operations, rights and financing, and the [Labor Law](#) regulates the other aspects of trade union activity.

Several attempts to restrict civil space by posing additional funding, reporting and registration requirements were stopped or delayed thanks to active civil society opposition. On 24 November 2021, the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs [submitted](#) a number of bills, “[Law on regulation of Foundations](#)” and “[Law on regulation of Federations](#)” to the Parliament. This led to a series of opposition such as from [National Center for Comprehensive Development NGO and Youth Policy Watch](#), [and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law](#) – resulting in it being sent back to the ministry. The proposed legislation had violated the processes legislated by the “[Law on Legislation](#)” and risked making civil society organisations subject to state scrutiny through evaluation mechanisms. Civil society groups, led by Youth Policy Watch NGO, are watching closely whether this regulation will come back, but the opaque lawmaking process is making it more challenging to acquire timely information.

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

The majority of local CSOs rely on international donors for their funding. With the recent U.S. Government funding halt, numerous local CSOs faced liquidity issues, reducing their human resources and cutting back on their projects. Additionally, the U.S. Government funding had a

toll on CSO reputation, posing them as foreign agents operating in Mongolia to threaten national security and brainwashing with liberal ideology.

Lack of core funding is a documented key challenge for local CSOs. Many CSOs' operations are project based, reducing opportunities to strengthen their organisational capacity. [As reported](#) by the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs, CSOs are securing the majority of their funding from international donor organisations, followed by individual and private donations, and lastly from their own enterprise activities.

High dependence on project funding means CSO core missions must shift to follow donor priorities. Additionally, rigorous requirements such as match funding, financial audit requirements and monitoring, evaluation and learning criteria - which are difficult to meet for local CSOs who operate on limited funding and small workforces, for acquiring funding from major donors such as the European Union - limit the capacity for local CSOs to apply individually. [The Law on Taxation of Entities was amended](#) in August 2024 to offer tax relief for entities that donate to certain social issues, such as supporting the elderly or building or renovating sports complexes, but the scope of activities to support CSO operations is extremely limited.

4. State Openness and Responsiveness

State openness has been significantly deteriorating since the COVID-19 pandemic. With social media growth, state public relations operations grew exponentially, limiting their need to interact with media openly. For instance, the [Prime Minister's public relations office's approved structure includes 29 employees](#), bigger than any average media organisation in Mongolia. The "[Law on Transparency of Public Information](#)" is highly debated as the implementation is insufficient, laying out 68 types of information as open to the public. Conversely, the "[Law on State and Official Secrets](#)" grants the government and its agencies the authority to approve the list of confidential information, effectively listing more than [1000 types of information as state and official secrets](#).

Mongolia is currently a signatory to 48 international treaties and conventions ensuring human rights. Despite this, in recent years, the lawmaking process has been largely carried out by the Government, violating certain due processes such as public discourse. In the last 10 years, a total of [473 new laws have been passed in Mongolia](#), with 125 laws initiated by Parliament members, 11 laws initiated by the President and 337 laws initiated by the Government. Out of 135 laws submitted to Parliament between January 2022 and July 2023, [there has been documented lack of necessary research before drafting those regulations](#).

The recently submitted [Press Freedom Bill](#) is another example of such legislation. Local civil society groups [voiced strongly against](#) the proposed bill as it is seen to threaten the existing freedom of expression environment, without offering tangible improvement.

From the optics, the state seems to be making amendments to crucial legislation to ensure human rights, but further analysis shows that these are all cosmetic changes aimed at manipulating public opinion to further the weaponisation of legislation. This is evident from feedback from various civil society members who have been invited as part of a working group on numerous legislations, only to have their voices limited during discussion. There has been strong pushback against working group members being able to speak publicly and their voices during working group discussions have been repeatedly ignored.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

There is underlying discourse that civil society organisations are irrelevant. A recent [article](#) published in a daily newspaper contained various opinions about the proposed Press Freedom

bill and included a quote from a journalist referring to civil society organisations fighting for improvement of the proposed bill as organisations that are creating an unrealistic problem around the bill's quality to raise project funds for their own activities. The fact that civil society organisations have limited capability to secure core funding and the fact that many of the CSOs' operations are project based has had an impact on their capacity and reputation. The public believes that CSOs only operate when they have project funding, and only for the funding, not for their mission.

The recent U.S. government funding halt was followed by a [social media narrative](#) (posted by a personal account that is heavily engaged in Russian propaganda) against civil society organisations, calling them foreign agents or traitors and the fact that USAID has halted its funding is one step to correct the mistakes that have been created in the past.

In one instance from a local NGO, a parliament member denied a request to meet on the basis that the NGO is seen as a foreign organisation because they were more than 90 percent funded by international donors. Therefore, trust in civil society organisations is quite low in Mongolia, limiting constructive discourse.

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Online disinformation is quite prevalent in Mongolia, with a lack of research into the scope of such operations. The only International Fact-checking Network (IFCN) signatory in Mongolia, [Mongolian fact-checking center](#), believes there are coordinated disinformation campaigns in the country that are led and funded by the government or state, but there is no conclusive evidence. A V-DEM Institute [report](#) stated that Mongolia shows one of the key symptoms of autocratising countries – government-led disinformation.

Additionally, in 2018, there have been claims that [nine journalists were subjected to surveillance](#). But the [“Law on investigation”](#) states that using devices to track surveillance devices is illegal. A group of lawyers challenged this clause in 2023, but the Constitutional Court [decided](#) that this claim [was not well grounded and decided to keep the legislation](#).

Challenges and Opportunities

Civil society and media in Mongolia are expected to face scrutiny from legislators as well as the public, fuelled by disinformation and harassment against civil society actors.

Several legislative regulations are expected to be amended during the 2025 Spring Parliamentary session including the package law on human rights as well as the Press Freedom Bill. Following a series of serious symptoms of shrinking civic space, civil society organisations continue to monitor the changes and discussions around these laws closely despite falling support. There are hopes that a record number of parliamentarians would play a significant role in diversifying discourse at lawmaking level.

There is strong distrust between lawmakers and civil society actors, which discourages constructive consultations. In this case, civil society actors need to try to create an enabling environment for consultation without confronting the lawmakers, which would lead to a more favourable legislative environment for human rights in Mongolia, especially supported by the fact that a record number of young parliamentarians are currently holding power.

Additionally, civil society groups need to be encouraged to work closely with lawyers to uncover obscure changes hidden within proposed regulations, rather than being carried away by the publicity led by the government.

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